

A SELF-WILLED FAMILY



By

E.S. Buckheim

Henry Drummond Memorial

U. F. Church Junior S. School.

January 16th 1916.

To Peggy McLettre

Sup't John Fraser

A SELF-WILLED FAMILY



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"SHE SLIPPED HER LITTLE HAND INTO MRS. MARSHALL'S" (p. 51).

Frontispiece.

A SELF-WILLED FAMILY

BY

E. S. BUCHHEIM

AUTHOR OF "HOLIDAYS AT SANDY BAY," ETC.

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A SELF-WILLED FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM AMERICA.

THE hot June sun shone down on the white dusty road that seemed to stretch for miles along the flat country without shade or shelter. Presently a tradesman's cart came along, raising a cloud of dust as it went its way that did not subside till the original cause was far out of sight. The dust had scarcely settled again when a small door opened in the red-brick wall on one side of the road, and the seven Miss Marshalls came out of the garden and, closing the door behind them, walked with an air of stern determination along the high road. They went straight on for about half a mile, then they turned through a gate, and across two fields. At the end of the second the land dipped and sloped down to a little hollow, which was filled up by a small beech wood or rather copse. The trees were large and old, the ground was thickly carpeted with the leaves that

had fallen year after year, and the whole place seemed delightfully cool and pleasant after the glare and the dust of the road. In the middle of the copse the sisters, too hot and dusty to speak, stopped and sat down in a circle under a large spreading beech. They were all dressed in plain, brown holland frocks and large sunbonnets like those the haymakers wear. The latter they now pulled off, showing their hair, which each girl wore combed straight back and plaited in one long thick plait with a ribbon at the end. Dorothy, the eldest, was a tall girl of fifteen. She was not pretty, but her face with its blue eyes and the peculiar warm complexion that goes with auburn hair was a very interesting one. She had been the leader of the motherless troop, and to a certain extent of the whole household, ever since her mother died seven years ago. Mr. Marshall was much away from home, and he seldom interfered with his daughters, partly from natural indolence, partly because he thought that as they had a governess and seemed quite happy there was nothing more for him to do. So Dorothy's will was law. It seemed the natural thing for the younger ones to obey her, and though a sudden rebellion was not an unusual thing in the family, the rebels always returned to their allegiance, and woe to the outsider who tried to oppose her, as various relatives had found to their

cost. Next to her came Marjory, her faithful aid and admirer, "short in size and short in temper," as a cousin said of her. The third was Evelyn, the beauty of the family, the only one with decent coloured hair, her sisters decided. She had golden hair, that hung waving round her when she was allowed to wear it open, which was not often, as Dorothy considered plaits more respectable. She was rather vain and rather lazy, but very good-natured when it was not too much trouble. Marian, who was twelve, was thought by her sisters to be in many ways the least satisfactory of the family; she was easily influenced, somewhat fretful in disposition, and very anxious to be on good terms with her immediate surroundings, an anxiety which occasionally led to her not being quite truthful. Elinor and Isabel were as yet inclined to be tomboys; they were always together. Elinor was not gifted with much respect for her elders, and she was not easy to manage, for opposition to her will developed a stubborn obstinacy and impertinence in her, difficult to overcome when once roused. Isabel was a sharp, bright child of nine, who managed to get enjoyment out of most things. Winifred was everybody's darling, a coaxing, lovable little soul, very fond of being petted when Dorothy was not by, though even Dorothy, who strongly objected to demonstrativeness because it was

so affected, had been known to take her on her knee. All the seven were strongly attached to each other, and the exclusiveness which reigns in most large families was increased in the Marshalls by their intense shyness and reserve with strangers. When alone in the family they were never quiet for long together.

"I'm so thirsty," said Elinor, after they had sat still for a minute.

"Then you should bear it in silence," returned Dorothy, "especially when there's nothing to drink."

"If you had let us have the conference in the house instead of dragging us here," began Elinor, but Evelyn stopped her grumbling by popping a large strawberry in her mouth.

"It's a good thing Evelyn likes eating," said Marian, as her sister began to divide the store which she carried in her basket.

"It makes her think of things at the proper time."

"The Spartans——" said Dorothy, proudly refusing the fruit.

"Oh, never mind the Spartans," cried Isabel; "I daresay they'd have taken the nice things if they could have had them without being found out."

"Won't you read father's letter?" interposed Marjory, for when Dorothy started on the Spartans,

whom she had discovered one day by chance, the family was generally united in its efforts to change the subject. Dorothy drew a letter out of her pocket, Marjory leant over her shoulder, the others sat and lay about in the leaves listening eagerly. They knew its contents already, but they had been obliged to keep in their excitement as Dorothy decided that such an important matter could only be properly discussed in the open air. She now began to read as follows:—

New York.

“DEAR CHILDREN,—I have a piece of news to tell you that will, I think, both surprise and please you. I am going to give you a new mother. I am soon to be married to a lady whom I first met last year, and to see whom I came over this year. Her name is Alice Leigh. I think she is very kind to consent to come among such a wild household as we are, but as her mother formerly kept a school she is not afraid of us. We shall have to put on our company manners, though. I know you will all be very fond of her when you see her. I send you a letter from your ‘new mamma,’ and I should like you to answer it. I also enclose her photo. We are to be married to-morrow, and shall be home some time in October or November. Mrs. Wright had better get anything for the house that is actually needed in the way of furniture and then the new mistress can make her own arrangements when she comes. It’s too hot here to do anything, so we’re going to the mountains after the wedding; if it hadn’t been for the heat you would have had my news before. Yours affectionately,

“FATHER.”

“Well,” began Elinor; but Dorothy held up her

hand. "We'll read her letter first," she said, and she began:—

"MY DEAR CHILDREN,—For that is what you will be by the time you get my letter. I want to write to you just to tell you how glad I am that we are all going to belong together. I feel as if I knew you already from your father's description, and I am certain we shall all be very happy together. Your father is so good and kind to me, but if I begin to tell you about that I shall never leave off, and I have still so much to do before to-morrow. I wish we were coming home earlier, for I feel so anxious to see you all, but unfortunately that cannot be. I shall constantly think about you and our future life, my dear little girls. I wish you would send me your photographs; your father has none with him. Now I must really stop, but I shall soon write again. With many, many kisses and much love, Yours very affectionately,

"ALICE LEIGH."

"What a pity father forgot to enclose the photograph," said Evelyn, "I should have liked to see what she's like."

"I don't think the letter very promising," remarked Dorothy thoughtfully, as she spread it out on her knee.

"What's wrong with it?" asked Marian.

"What do you think, Marjory?" asked Dorothy.

"I don't know," answered Marjory doubtfully, "I don't quite seem able to take it in that father is going to be married."

"Is married," interposed Isabel, who was lying on her face making a heap of the brown leaves.

"So he is," cried Evelyn, sitting bolt upright in her astonishment.

"No," said Winifred, "it's to-morrow; he says so."

"It was to be the day after he wrote, and though there's no date on the letter, it must have been over weeks ago," returned Dorothy. "Besides, he probably carried the letter about for days after he'd written it. He generally forgets to post his letters."

"He says to-morrow," persisted Winifred.

"Why, don't you see," began Dorothy, but Marian broke in: "Oh, don't waste time explaining to Winifred. She's such a little stupid, and—anyhow, we understand that we've got a new mamma."

"I don't see what made father do it," said Elinor: "I'm sure we were all comfortable enough as we were."

"Perhaps," said Evelyn, who was much given to reading any novels she could get hold of, and whose opinion of the world in general was based on her reading, "perhaps she ran after him."

"That's nonsense," answered Dorothy sharply, "I wonder you can have such ugly ideas."

"Then father must have been in love with her."

"He couldn't," said Isabel. "Everyone says he was in love with our own mother."

"You can be in love with several people," explained the well-read Evelyn.

"You needn't be in love at all," said Elinor, "like Dorothy and George. They simply hate each other."

"That's different," returned Dorothy scornfully. "If father had a son I shouldn't have to marry that horrid little fellow." George was the only son of Mr. Marshall's brother. His father was dead, and he was the next heir to Elmfields, Mr. Marshall's estate. No one knew what had put the idea into Dorothy's head, but she was convinced that she and George would have to marry, so that the estate should not pass away entirely from her father's family. She was very unhappy at the idea, as she could not bear her cousin, but she considered it her duty, and though Evelyn had offered to take her place, she would not hear of the sacrifice, and as a rule the subject was avoided, since she disliked it so.

"Well," remarked Marjory, "I suppose we shall have to wait till we can ask them ourselves."

"I think I understand it," answered Dorothy, who had been studying the letter. "You see, this Miss Leigh's mother had a school, so they can't be rich. Probably she has to earn her living, and she's such a weak character that she can't get on, and father, who is always so kindhearted, felt sorry for her."

"Why do you think she has such a weak character?" asked Marian, surprised.

"Her letter proves that," replied Dorothy. "For one thing she has got behindhand with her preparations, and that shows a weak character."

"That's putting off, and anyone can do that without being weak," remarked Evelyn.

"Why, even father does," said Elinor, who never did at once what could be put off till the next day.

"You're too young to understand," answered Dorothy. "But I must say what I don't like about the letter is all that pretence about loving us when she knows nothing whatever about us."

"Father told her," objected Winifred.

"That might interest her, but it couldn't make her love us," replied Dorothy decidedly.

"Then you don't think she can be very nice, and we needn't trouble to like her?" asked Isabel, dropping a handful of leaves on Evelyn's hair.

"I didn't say that," answered Dorothy, while Evelyn pinched Isabel and lazily removed the leaves. "Of course we shall have to wait and see if she really makes father happy."

"And us," added Marjory. "When you get a stepmother——"

"A stepmother," cried Winifred, sitting up aghast, "Will she be our stepmother?"

‘Of course,’ answered Dorothy. “What else did you think she was? Evelyn, you needn’t shriek if I tell you, but there’s a spider just crawling on to your neck.”

Evelyn did shriek, however; the younger ones laughed at her agitation, while Marjory brushed off the spider. Dorothy, who tried to teach her family to bear their troubles with fortitude, prepared to lecture Evelyn, but Winifred was too full of her new discovery to let her speak.

“If she’s really and truly our stepmother,” she said, “we cannot possibly like her. I never heard of a stepmother who was nice.”

“What stepmothers do you know of?” asked Marjory.

“There was Cinderella’s, and there was the girl’s who went down the well, and there was the girl’s who had to find the strawberries in the snow, and there was Snowdrop’s,” triumphantly answered Winifred, who was well grounded in her fairy tales, though she knew nothing else. “And there were a lot of others, only I’ve forgotten them, but, anyhow, they were all horrid.”

“It’s quite true,” added Isabel. “And I’m sure there were a lot in history, only I can’t remember my history ever.”

“Henry VIII. had six,” said Elinor.

"No, no," cried Dorothy. "They were wives."

"Then his children had them," maintained Elinor, who was not easily daunted.

"I don't see, after all, that it matters much," said Dorothy thoughtfully. "She won't have much to do with us, and of course we shall explain to her how we manage. At all events we ought to give her a fair chance and not be prejudiced against her. If there had been time, we could have advised father to think twice about it, but as it's too late we must just make the best of it, and see what she's like. So we will all try to like her, and then if we don't, it won't be our fault, and we shan't have anything to reproach ourselves with."

"But I feel prejudiced," objected Winifred.

"No, you don't," answered Dorothy firmly, "You are going to be good and try to like her."

"I suppose I must," sighed Winifred, who generally took her opinions from her eldest sister.

"I'm tired of discussing," said Elinor, and she and Isabel jumped up and began to climb the tree against which Dorothy leant.

"We must write a letter," said Marjory. "Father wants us to."

"And we must be photographed," cried Evelyn eagerly. "We must be done in our best dresses, with our hair loose."

"No, no," answered Dorothy. "She must see us as we are, in our everyday dress. It would be too affected else."

Evelyn pouted, and declared she would not be done.

"But what would be the sense of dressing as we don't usually dress?" asked Dorothy. "It is better that she learns to know us at once with all our peculiarities and idiosyncrasies."

The others were struck dumb for a minute by this last word, and even the discontented Evelyn gazed admiringly at her sister.

"Are they anything nice?" called Elinor from the tree, on a branch of which she and Isabel were now seated, in what looked a very uncomfortable position, for a sudden movement of one was sure to upset the other.

"Are what nice?"

"Our idiocies," answered Elinor, who had rather a talent for using wrong words.

"Idiosyncrasies," repeated Dorothy, slowly. "That means the things that make us different from other people."

"I don't suppose we're really very different from other people," observed Marjory.

"Oh, yes we are," cried Isabel, with some pride.

"The servants at the Hall say they never saw any children like us before."

"I don't suppose they've seen many children besides that horrid little George," retorted Dorothy. "But now don't interrupt. This afternoon we will go into the town and be photographed in these dresses and sun-bonnets."

"I shall not wear my sun-bonnet into town," said Evelyn, in a calm, obstinate tone.

"Don't you think the hats show our faces more, and after all that is what is wanted?" asked Marjory, anxious to cut short the inevitable quarrel that arose when Dorothy's will and Evelyn's obstinacy (it was Dorothy herself who drew this distinction) came into collision. After a little further discussion Dorothy yielded as regarded the hats, and turned her attention to the letter. "It's got to be answered," she said, after a pause, "so we'd better think it out now. I'll scribble it down roughly on this piece of paper."

"How shall you begin?" asked Marjory.

"'Dear Miss Leigh,' of course; 'Dear' means nothing in a letter," returned Dorothy.

"But if she's married to father, she must be Mrs. Marshall," said Evelyn.

"Oh well, of course," said Dorothy crossly, for she hated to make a mistake. "That's what I meant; we can't stop at every trifle," and she scribbled down the

"Dear Mrs. Marshall," without paying attention to the giggling of Isabel and Elinor, who rather enjoyed it when Dorothy was caught. "How will this do?" she went on, 'We thank you for your letter, and were rather astonished to hear the news. Of course, till we see you we can make no rash promises, but as you seem to want to make us happy, we think we can promise to try and welcome you in our midst,' and then when that's copied we put our names," she added.

"It's rather short," said Marjory hesitatingly, for she did not care to criticise Dorothy's productions.

"And not nearly as affectionate as hers," cried Elinor.

"Because she is hypocritical, and pretends to feel affectionate when she can't. I don't see why we should humbug," replied Dorothy sternly, as she turned over her sheet of paper. "Now father's letter, and then we can go home."

"Poor father," sighed Marian, who was given to attacks of gloom, especially, so her sisters said, when she was hungry. "I hope she'll make him happy."

"I don't see why she shouldn't," responded Marjory. "She wouldn't have married him if she hadn't liked him."

"And it takes little enough to make father happy," chimed in Isabel.

"She might do away with that little," persisted Marian.

"Oh, don't talk nonsense," said Dorothy briskly. "If Aunt Fanny couldn't damp father's spirits, I shouldn't think this lady would."

"After all," continued Marian, in her gloomiest tones, "Evelyn is the one who will suffer most."

"Why?" asked Evelyn, intensely astonished.

"Because you are the prettiest, and stepmothers always ill-treat the prettiest and—"

"Don't put such silly ideas into her head," interrupted Dorothy, who had been busy writing. "She's not so pretty as all that; she's only the least plain of a plain family, and she need not go about perking and think everyone's admiring her," added the eldest sister, who was really very proud of her golden-haired sister, but who was always desperately afraid of encouraging anything like vanity or affection. "Now, how do you think this will do?"

"DEAR FATHER,—We were very much surprised at your news, but we suppose it is all right, and as it is too late to advise you, we won't. Else we should have asked you whether you understood that, in marrying again, you were giving us a stepmother. Still, stepmothers may not be as bad as they are painted, and no doubt you did it for the best, and we shall all be very happy. We are all well and it's very hot. We shall be glad when we can go home, as we don't like this place.'

"You see," the reader went on, looking up from the letter, "as they're married it's no use making father uncomfortable by telling him what we think of her character, but at the same time I've put him on his guard in a way."

"So you have," said Marjory admiringly, as she took up the letter. "It's a splendid letter."

"I think it's a silly one," shouted Elinor, who was getting rather tired of the whole business. "It's so patternising."

"Patronising, you goose," corrected Dorothy.

"One word's as good as another," retorted Elinor, while Isabel added: "Of course, we don't get a chance to say what we want, for Dorothy settles everything, and Marjory always agrees with her."

"But you never said a word," began Dorothy.

"They are a couple of rude, unmannerly children," broke in Marjory, angrily. "They've no business to speak to you like that."

"Hurrah, Marjory's in a temper," cried Elinor. "Wouldn't you like to come up and pinch me?"

"Oh girls, don't quarrel, when such troubles lie before us," groaned Marian.

"It must be dinner time," said Dorothy. "Cheer up, Marian, we're going home," and she put her papers in her pocket, and was tying her sun-bonnet when

Winifred, who had been playing contentedly with her doll, suddenly asked: "What are we to call her?"

"Call whom?" asked Dorothy, stopping short.

"The stepmother," replied Winifred.

"I never thought of that," said Dorothy gravely.

"We shall have to call her mother," observed Evelyn, swinging her hated sun-bonnet by its strings.

"Oh, we couldn't!" cried Marian.

"No," said Dorothy, in emphatic tones. "You can't call a person 'mother' unless you love her dearly. It would be humbug."

"But we can't call her Alice or Mrs. Marshall," objected Marjory.

"I'll think it over," said Dorothy, after a pause. "I expect we must call her 'Mamma' so as to please father, but for the present we cannot go beyond that. Come, girls."

Isabel and Elinor descended safely from their tree, and the procession started homewards. The journey seemed longer, hotter, and dustier than the previous one, but no one dared complain, though some of the party lagged a little, and all were glad when the door in the wall was reached. They were spending the summer at the home of the Aunt Fanny, of whom they had spoken, the mother of George. Their father had let Elmfields, their "ancestral home," as the girls called it, some years ago, and the lease would

not expire for another year, and as the drains of the house at Hampstead where they lived had to undergo certain repairs, and they could not stay at home, Mrs. George Marshall, who was on the Continent, invited the girls and their governess to stay at her house till they could go home again. They liked neither the house nor the surrounding country, which was flat and uninteresting. In fact, they never were really happy unless they were in their own home, as they disliked strangers, and they disliked strange places.

In the first years after his wife's death Mr. Marshall had been overwhelmed by offers of help and by advice from friends and relatives. He really knew very little of his children, for in those days they lived at Elmfields, while he and his wife spent most of their time in London or abroad, and when they were in the country the house was generally full of visitors. He had a general impression, but not an intimate knowledge, of his children's characters and dispositions, and they looked on him as a kind-hearted, good-tempered man, who rarely interfered with them, but whose promises were not made to be relied on. Their mother they remembered very little, and they seldom spoke of her.

Of all the suggestions that Mr. Marshall's friends and relatives showered upon him with regard to the

management of his children, there was only one that at all pleased him, and that was the necessity for a governess. Aunt Fanny, George's mother, had at first tried to do her duty by the family, but the family had not approved, and as she was not very fond of children, and left her own son to servants and tutors, she soon gave up her efforts and contented herself with securing a governess for her nieces and with finding fault whenever they met. She found an excellent governess in Miss Ellis, a lady with plenty of certificates, who would have been a treasure to a well-disciplined household, but in her very efforts to do her duty she managed to set servants and children against her. She held out for nine months, and then she resigned her post. Aunt Fanny was very angry, and as she had not at that time renounced all hope of influencing the girls she came to inquire and to reprove.

"If she had only tried to teach us," said Dorothy to her aunt, "we could have borne it, though we think her lessons dull, but she wanted to interfere with us out of lessons, and to teach us manners; that's not the governess's work."

Mrs. Marshall looked despairingly at the young lady of nine who argued so firmly on the duties of governesses. "But my poor dear child," she said in expostulating tones, "remember you have no mother,

and your governess must do her best to take her place."

"Then she would have to be very different from Miss Ellis," answered Dorothy. "But nobody could take dear mother's place," she added with a little sigh.

"But, my dear, you are only a little girl, and Miss Ellis must know best what you want," said Aunt Fanny feebly, for when Dorothy introduced "dear mother" it was so difficult to argue with her, and the sharp child soon found this out.

"Grown ups may be older than children, but they don't always know best," put in Marjory unexpectedly.

"But your manners really are bad," went on their aunt, who found it easier to continue her list of grievances than to dispute their arguments.

"Father says we are naturally polite, and he prefers natural to artificial manners," returned Dorothy. "We are all right as long as we are not interfered with."

Miss Ellis left, and after a due interval was succeeded by a nervous well-meaning lady, who in her anxiety to please everybody managed to please nobody, who never could get the children to come to lessons, and who left at a moment's notice because a pet white mouse had escaped from its cage and made

a cosy nest in her best winter bonnet for itself and its five young ones. Her successor had the reputation of being a firm disciplinarian, but her attempts at enforcing obedience met with such determined opposition on the part of the household that she did not find her post a very comfortable one. The servants, who grumbled incessantly at the children and their ways, were furious when Miss Brown attempted to inflict well-deserved punishment, and they incited the pupils to disobedience, and refused to attend properly to the governess's wants. At last the housekeeper appealed to Mr. Marshall and told him the children were being crushed, and their spirit would be broken. So Miss Brown went away, and for some months the children were left to themselves, till one day Mr. Marshall told them that, as he had let the house and they were to live in London, he would have to find them another governess. Then Dorothy took matters into her own hands. Elmfields was about three miles from the small country town, Newton. Though the children were well known there they had few acquaintances, as they always shrank from any friendly advances, but they occasionally visited a Mrs. Daly and her daughter. Miss Daly had been a governess, and while Mrs. Marshall was alive she had taught the elder girls a few lessons. But her

mother became an invalid, and required all her daughter's attention, unfortunately as it happened, for they were very poor. Miss Daly managed to get a few orders for needlework and embroidery, in which she excelled, but her life was a very hard and self-denying one. Dorothy came in one day when Miss Daly was having her dinner of bread and cheese, and when she went in to visit Mrs. Daly she saw that the mother had dined off a small chicken, a present from a neighbour. She had tact enough to say nothing, but it made a deep impression on her and strengthened her liking and respect for Miss Daly. Mrs. Daly died, and as the small annuity on which she and her daughter lived ceased at her death, it was absolutely necessary for Miss Daly to earn her living. She was in great distress, for she was very shy. She knew little, and her methods were old-fashioned, so that it could not fail to be exceedingly difficult for her to find a situation. Dorothy and Marjory had a long talk together, after which they went to see her.

When Mr. Marshall said after tea that he must write to his sister-in-law about a governess, Dorothy remarked, "Don't trouble, father; I've engaged Miss Daly."

"You've engaged Miss Daly!" exclaimed Mr. Marshall.

"Yes, subject to your approval, she told us to tell you."

"She's coming to see you at half-past eleven to-morrow," added Marjory.

"I think she'll suit us," continued Dorothy. "She has promised not to interfere with us, and not to bother us too much about lessons, and we have promised to obey her about things she really knows best about."

"Who is to settle what things those are?" asked Mr. Marshall.

"Oh, of course we shall know," returned Dorothy. "You see, we don't like it when you have to go to lessons at half-past nine, work till twelve, take a walk, have dinner, half an hour's play, more lessons. One isn't always inclined for lessons, and Miss Daly agreed to make concessions."

Mr. Marshall had a talk with Miss Daly. He was sorry for her, the girls liked her, he hated the trouble of finding somebody else, and so he engaged her as an experiment. In some ways it answered very well. Miss Daly was shy and afraid of arousing opposition, but she had a strong sense of duty, she was persistent and methodical, and gradually she acquired an influence over the girls, though they were not aware of it. Her quiet "Did you mean to do lessons to-day, my dears?" had such an effect in the course of time,

that her pupils began to come regularly of their own accord, that is, the elder ones; the younger ones had occasionally to be driven to work by their stern seniors. She never really scolded, but for this very reason her remonstrances were effectual, and though the girls learnt little and did what they liked, she served them as a guide and a check, everybody liked her, and the house was better for her presence. She never gave her opinion unasked, but when it was asked, she said exactly what she thought, and the girls knew it and respected her accordingly.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARATIONS.

MISS DALY was much troubled when she heard the news, though she did her best to conceal her thoughts. The girls seemed convinced that a stepmother would make little difference in their life, as long as she tried to make them happy, but she saw very well that the new Mrs. Marshall would have to introduce a great many changes in every direction if she wished

to be mistress of the house and a real mother to the children, and although her chief anxiety was for her charges, she was too conscious of her own deficiencies not to feel alarmed as to her own future. She determined, however, to say nothing that might set her charges against their stepmother, and, to tell the truth, she considered herself too much one of the household to think she might be sent away.

After dinner the girls went to be photographed in a family group. The photographer pleaded hard that they would take off their hats and have their hair loose. "You know, Miss Dorothy," he said, "it isn't a group to do me or you justice."

"The object of the photograph is to show us as we really are," returned Dorothy firmly.

"But those hats throw such a shadow over the face, you will come out unrecognisable," said the man despairingly, and Dorothy yielded so far as to allow the hats to be removed. But she would go no further, and the seven sisters were photographed in a stiff group, the four elder ones at the back, the three younger ones in front. When they had left the studio, Evelyn said she had forgotten her handkerchief, and she and Marian ran back. The others did not wait, and it was not till the proofs came home that Evelyn's guilt was discovered. She had been photographed by herself with her hair all loose about

her. The picture was charming, but Dorothy looked on it as a family disgrace, and it was a long time before she forgave Evelyn for being so "vain and underhand."

The letters to America had been sent off, but Mrs. Marshall's was entirely rewritten. Dorothy was not satisfied with the first draft, and though Marjory searched the "Letter-writer" in vain for a letter of congratulation to a stepmother, they were all much taken by the style of the book, upon which, after much deliberation, they modelled their letter as follows:—

"DEAR MADAME,—We, the undersigned, beg to present to you our best wishes on your union with our respected father, and trust that a nearer acquaintance will tend to promote those reciprocal feelings of affection which will enable us to live in peace and harmony, and present to the world the sight of a family united in itself. We remain, Dear Madam,

Here followed the signatures of the seven sisters.

"It doesn't make us say anything we don't feel," said Dorothy, as she put up the letter after it had been signed.

"And it sounds so grand," said Elinor, full of admiration for the long words.

Miss Daly thought she would have worded the letter differently, but she knew better than to say so, and as the girls did no lessons in the country she

set to work on one of her beautiful pieces of embroidery as a present for the young bride whose coming must make such a difference to all.

"Bother," said Dorothy, one morning, soon after the scene in the wood; "that horrid little George is coming here for a few days on his way to join Aunt Fanny. If I'd known that, I'd have stayed at home, drains and all."

"And perhaps died of diphteria," said Elinor solemnly.

"Diphtheria," said Dorothy.

"It doesn't matter; it kills you, however you spell it," returned Elinor cheerfully.

"And then you wouldn't need to marry George," put in Marian.

"I don't mind him so much," observed Evelyn. "And I'm sure if it made you happy, I'd take him off your hands."

"I've explained to you already," retorted Dorothy, crossly, "that wouldn't do. I have to be sacrificed because I'm the eldest. It's all connected with the law of entail."

"Extremes meet," said Evelyn, who now and then liked to annoy her sisters. "Wouldn't Winifred do as well, for the youngest and the eldest must be the same, according to that rule?"

"I think it's going to be a very hot day,"

remarked Winifred, who had no idea what her sisters were talking about, but who noticed that Dorothy seemed vexed, and therefore tried to change the conversation.

Three days later George arrived with a bicycle, which he strictly forbade his cousins to touch.

"Can you ride it?" asked Isabel, as they all stood round it.

"I haven't had it very long, but I'm getting on very well, very well indeed, everybody says," answered George boastfully.

"Quite the champion of the school," suggested Elinor.

"Well, of course, other fellows have had theirs longer," he replied, "so I didn't go in for the sports. You see I wanted the very best kind, and there was such a run on them, I had to wait for months before I got mine."

"Did you try for the running and jumping prizes?" asked Evelyn.

"No, mother forbade me to, as the sports were so late this year, and the weather so hot," he replied.

"Did you get any school prizes?" asked Marian.

"What a lot of questions you ask," retorted George crossly.

"I suppose your mother forbade you to work too hard," observed Dorothy, in a tone of irritating sym-

pathy. "It is touching how obedient you have grown."

"Now, look here," began George furiously, but Winifred interrupted him by begging him to mount and show them how he rode. This simple suggestion seemed to make him very cross, and he said he was too tired, and that he must go and see his room. The fact was that he could not ride by himself yet, though he had had the machine for some time, for he was very unskilful and lazy in anything he undertook. He wanted to impress his cousins with his wonderful accomplishments, but they had an unpleasant way of asking for details or practical demonstrations which made him look silly, and annoyed him extremely. His idea was to get up early and practise in the road before his cousins were down. This would serve a double purpose, for while they would think he had been for a long ride, he would be gaining the necessary experience to show off before he went away. Unfortunately his laziness prevented him from getting up till late, and, of course, under the circumstances it was out of the question for him to practise when there was anyone about. His persistent refusal to ride made the girls very suspicious, and whenever their subjects for quarrelling flagged, which was seldom it must be confessed, they

always returned to the bicycle, and never failed to send him from the room in a passion. Elinor and Isabel were wild to try it, but it was kept carefully padlocked by its owner. He was to stay at home for a week, and on the fifth day he made a violent effort and came down early. He took out his bicycle into the road, and promised the gardener's boy a shilling if he would help him without telling anyone. After several attempts he told the boy that he would try alone, so after he had mounted and started his assistant let go ; the bicycle staggered about for a few minutes, then it went over, and its rider of course fell with it. A loud laugh greeted him, and on getting up he saw his seven cousins sitting on the wall and shaking with laughter. He was furious. He did not mind the fall, though on ordinary occasions he made a fuss about every trifle, but he was very angry that he had been found out, and could not tell his cousins of the long ride he had enjoyed before breakfast as he had intended to do, for he was not very particular about the truth. He hated to be laughed at, so without paying any attention to the girls and their rude remarks, he ordered the lad to bring back the bicycle and went in.

“ How lovely that I saw him sneaking off ! ” cried Elinor, as she scrambled off the wall. “ Else we should have missed this lovely sight.”

"What a temper he's in," said Isabel. "He won't be fit to speak to all day."

"He's a horrid, deceitful boy," cried Dorothy. "He was going to pretend he'd been for a ride. Oh, how I hate him!"

"I should like to try the bicycle," said Elinor, as they all stood round it. "Do hold it, Jim, and let me try."

"I daren't, Miss Elinor. Master George'll be so angry. I daresay I shan't get my shilling, anyhow," he added ruefully.

"Look here, Jim," said Elinor, who hated to give in when she made up her mind to anything, "I'll give you the shilling if you'll let me try."

"And George is going away in two days, so he won't matter," added Isabel.

"And you said you were going to another place, so he can't hurt you anyway," put in Marian, who always contrived to know everything about everybody.

"Let her try," said Dorothy, who in her indignation at George's deceitfulness, was ready to do anything to spite him.

Most of the servants regarded Dorothy as an authority, so Jim, after making sure that the bicycle was uninjured, helped Elinor to mount, and he held her on safely. Isabel tried next, and Marian was

just preparing to get on, regardless of the fact that a milkman and a carter had joined the spectators, when George came rushing out with such violence that he upset Winifred. While Marjory and Evelyn picked her up and comforted her, he pushed Marian aside and struck at Jim, who managed in revenge to knock over the bicycle. Dorothy flew at George and shook him violently. "You're the meanest little cad I ever came across," she cried, "to knock down poor little girls and hit defenceless servants. Come to breakfast, girls," she added, letting go of him after a final shake, and turning to re-enter the garden. "I wish he were as smashed as the bicycle, so that I needn't marry him."

George had a wholesome horror of Dorothy's fist ever since she had thrashed him for being cruel to a dog, so he turned away suddenly to examine his injured property, muttering that you couldn't hit a girl. In his heart he was not altogether sorry to find that the machine would need repairing, for now he need not take it abroad with him but could tell his mother wonderful accounts of his own prowess, without the bother of learning. Still he was very angry with the girls for finding him out, and everyone was glad when it was time for him to go.

The girls were all longing to be at home again. They were very fond of London and never tired of

the shops. They liked the country, but then, as they said, "That's the beauty of Hampstead. You walk one way and you seem to be miles away from London. You walk the other, and you have all the joys of the town."

At last they heard that the drains were in order, and they promptly started for home.

At the station Elinor and Isabel began to go through a series of gymnastics. "What are you doing?" asked Marian. "Everybody is staring at you."

"Shaking the dust off our feet," answered Elinor, as she produced a piece of paper and began to rub the soles of her boots. "I hate that house, and I hate this country, and never, never, never do I wish to enter them more."

The London household consisted of the cook, who also acted as housekeeper, and who had been in the family for years, of the parlourmaid, the housemaid, and the kitchenmaid. As a rule the children's old nurse, Mary Stevens, was also in the house. Her husband was a sailor, and whenever he was away on a voyage she lived with the Marshalls and acted as maid to the children. When her husband was at home she contented herself with running in every day to see to the mending of the children's clothes, of which there was always a goodly supply, but she was

quite looked on as one of the family, and had a considerable influence over the younger girls. At present Tom Stevens was at home, but he expected to be off shortly. Like his wife he spent a good deal of his time at the house, for the children all liked him and were never tired of listening to his wonderful tales, and his wife found his help very useful, as he was almost more skilful at the needle than she.

The servants were at first very much upset by the news of their master's marriage, and they all decided to give notice, but though they understood better than Miss Daly and her pupils that there would be great changes, they soon began to think matters might not be so bad after all, and then it would be so unfair to leave "the poor dear children and poor dear Miss Daly. Anyone might put upon them, they were so kind-hearted, and it would be too sad if that sweet Miss Dorothy were crushed."

Meanwhile Dorothy, into whose head the idea of being crushed never entered, was very busy. Their father wrote that any absolutely necessary repairs must be undertaken at once, but that all other changes were to be left till he and his wife returned, as Mrs. Marshall was very artistic in her tastes, and it would be a pity to get anything she did not like. So a council of war was called in the schoolroom.

"We shall have to get a new wall-paper and new

curtains for Mrs. Marshall's room," said Mrs. Wright. "The paper was painted all over by Miss Elinor and Miss Isabel when they got their new paint-box, and Miss Winifred cut a piece out of the curtains."

"It was for the mother of the man who mends our boots," explained Winifred. "She's making a patch-work quilt, and I thought it would go well with what she'd got."

"It's rather a fine quilt," said Marian. "She wants to sell it when it's done."

"We might buy it as a present for them, when they come home," observed Dorothy, thoughtfully. "We wanted our present to be useful and ornamental, and if we like the quilt, it will be charitable as well."

"Then we'll do up that room," continued Mrs. Wright, hugging Winifred, who had climbed on her knee. "And we'll leave the rest of the house if you agree with me."

"Oughtn't we to get a carpet as well?" asked Marjory.

"The one that's down is good enough for the present," said Dorothy.

"Well, you see, there's the hole under the bed," remarked Evelyn.

"A hole under the bed!" cried Mrs. Wright and Mary.

"Yes, I went to hide there one day for hide and

seek, and I didn't like the dark, so I took a candle, and it fell on the floor and made it all greasy, so Marjory and I cut away the spoilt piece and——”

“ Why, you might have set the place on fire and all been killed,” broke in Mrs. Wright.

“ I'll just run up and have a look,” said Mary, and she soon returned to say that there was a bit of the carpet in the store room with which she could repair the damage. Mrs. Wright was satisfied, Miss Daly rarely differed from the housekeeper, and Dorothy was not much interested in carpets, so it was decided to confine the improvements to the curtains and the paper, but Dorothy's suggestion that she and Mrs. Wright could make the selection was rejected by her sisters, who insisted that they must be of the party.

“ Then we'll leave the other rooms,” said Dorothy. “ And indeed I can't fancy that there will be much to alter. She ought to think them lovely.”

“ I hope she won't want to change dear mother's sitting-room,” observed Marian lugubriously. “ We should not lose the associations.”

“ What associations you've got with it is more than I know,” returned Dorothy, sharply, “ considering you were never in the house when mother was alive.”

“ It's not everyone who's as unfeeling as you,” answered Marian in an aggrieved tone, “ I can imagine things.”

"I think it will be so hard to say 'Mamma,'" remarked Winifred. "I wish you'd let me practise on you, Miss Daly."

"Oh, my dear," said Miss Daly in a shocked tone, "that would never do. You might call me so by mistake when Mrs. Marshall is here, and it would hurt her feelings."

"That wouldn't matter," cried Isabel. "If it hurts her feelings, she must be a silly."

"We ought to have a reception," said Evelyn, who was lying back in the easy chair, her arms stretched above her head, in the attitude of the heroine of the last book she had read. "People always do when brides are expected."

"Of course, she'll have a reception," said Dorothy. "We shall all go in the hall to receive them. That's simple politeness, and nobody can expect us to do more than that."

"I don't mean that," answered Evelyn, "I mean something grand, with the place made beautiful with decorations and speeches."

"How are you going to make a place beautiful with speeches?" asked Marjory, looking up from her work. She was putting paper covers on some of the schoolbooks, the torn and dirty condition of which troubled her neat soul and distracted her attention from her lessons.

"And who's going to make the speeches?" asked Dorothy, who was sitting with both her elbows on the table.

"You are a set of sillies," sighed Evelyn. "We'll make the speeches."

"I shan't for one," retorted Dorothy. "I'm not going to make a fool of myself."

"You can't help doing that when you're so conceited," replied Evelyn, annoyed that her suggestion was not hailed with delight.

Marjory pushed her book away angrily. "Dorothy's not conceited," she began, when Mary interposed—

"I think it would be rather a good thing to decorate the hall with flags and flowers."

"But it will look so silly," objected Dorothy.

"Indeed it won't, Miss Dorothy," said Mrs. Wright. "I know it's usually done. There was a fine set out when your own dear mamma came home to Elmfields after her marriage."

"Oh, yes," cried Elinor, "I've heard all about it. Do let's have a reception with triumphal arches and fireworks and bonefires."

"Bonefires?" repeated Mrs. Wright, much puzzled.

"The child means bonfires," explained Dorothy. "And I think they would be silly. I don't approve

of the decorations, but if you think they will be expected I won't object. Nothing shall be wanting on my part to bring about the establishment of harmonious relations," and she leant back in her chair well pleased at the admiration her noble sentiments and fine language had aroused.

As the elders also protested against the bonfire and fireworks, this part of the proposed reception was rejected, while the decorations were unanimously voted for.

"We must have new dresses," said Evelyn, sitting upright in her excitement at the idea. "Do let's have white ones made long, and a wee bit cut out."

Poor Evelyn's ideas regarding dress generally met with scorn, and this one was not more fortunate, for even Miss Daly thought it absurd. There was a long discussion, and finally it was decided that the dresses should be a bright claret, made quite plain in a sort of princess style, and Evelyn's only comfort was: "Anyhow, I shall look better than you girls, for the colour will look simply awful with your red hair and complexion, while my golden hair will look rather well."

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

"MISS Elinor, they'll come none the quicker for your opening the door and letting in the east wind."

"I can't help it, Wright, I've got the fidgets," replied Elinor.

"It is exciting," said Isabel. "It isn't everyone expects a mother they've never seen."

The whole household was assembled in the hall, awaiting the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall. Tom had decorated the hall under the children's supervision with flags and paper ornaments and flowers. The effect was very gay, and what was especially admired was the American flag, which had been intertwined with the Union Jack as a delicate compliment to Mrs. Marshall's nationality. Dorothy had serious doubts as to whether it was right to encourage sentiments of nationality in Mrs. Marshall, who would be an Englishwoman in future, but she finally yielded to the persuasions of her sisters. They were all dressed in new red dresses. Evelyn did her best to persuade Dorothy to let her wear her hair unbraided, and modify the bright red of her dress with a lace collar, but

Dorothy refused, and she and Marjory, who were in favour of perfect simplicity, kept a careful watch over the vain young lady to prevent her slipping upstairs and making the desired alterations. Dorothy had composed a little speech of welcome, which she intended to recite, and which was rather admired by the family.

At last the sound of carriage wheels was heard. The door was flung open, and Mr. and Mrs. Marshall entered. This was the moment when Dorothy should have advanced and made her speech; she took a step forward, suddenly realised that it was a perfect stranger who stood before her, gasped, and would have run away had not Mrs. Marshall put her arms round her and drawn her closer.

“This tall girl must be Dorothy,” she said, stooping down to kiss her. “My dear child, I am so very, very glad to come home and see you all.”

Dorothy was passive, she could not say a word, for whenever she came into contact with a stranger, she felt perfectly frozen and could not even think. Mrs. Marshall turned to the others. “I know you all,” she said. “I feel as if we were all old friends, don’t you?” The girls submitted in silence to her embraces, only Winifred disappeared behind Miss Daly, and had to be fetched out by her father, who was looking very much amused.

"They'll be all right, by-and-by, Alice," he said cheerfully, patting Dorothy on the shoulder. "While they're finding out that you don't bite, let me introduce you to the rest of the household. This is Miss Daly, the faithful friend of whom I have told you."

Mrs. Marshall shook Miss Daly by the hand. "I hope," she said, "you will be as good a friend to me as you have been to these dear children."

Miss Daly stammered a few words and shrank back behind Mrs. Wright, who was far less embarrassed, and who even ventured on a little speech when her turn came. "And I thank you kindly, Ma'am, I hope you'll find we've all done our duty to the dear children," she said.

The introductions over, the servants went downstairs, and Mr. Marshall asked Dorothy if they were to have anything to eat.

"It will be ready at six," she answered, as stiffly as if she were talking to a stranger; "that gives you a quarter of an hour to take off your things and wash your hands."

This arrangement, which had been much discussed, was voted very ridiculous by the younger ones, who wanted the meal at once, and objected to unnecessary washing of hands, but Mary and Mrs. Wright declared that married ladies never sat down to meals without washing their hands, because their



"MRS. MARSHALL LOOKED ROUND IN ASTONISHMENT."

husbands didn't like it, and the necessary interval was left in the programme.

The whole procession followed Mr. and Mrs. Marshall upstairs in order to see what effect was produced by the sight of the improvements in the bedroom. Mrs. Marshall looked round in astonishment when Dorothy flung open the door in triumph. Mr. Marshall whistled. "I thought nothing was to be done till we came," he said.

"You told us to see what was necessary, and Wright said this room must be done up," answered Dorothy, adding anxiously: "Doesn't it please you?"

"Oh, very much," he answered, laughing, as he looked at his wife. "It's decidedly gay."

"You see, you said that, that, that *she* was of an artistic nature," explained Dorothy, who found it dreadfully hard to bring out her words, and who didn't know what to call Mrs. Marshall. Mr. Marshall sat down and laughed. His wife made an effort, and began to admire whatever she conscientiously could. It certainly was a sight to grieve anyone with any love of harmony in colour. The paper had a large and gaily-coloured pattern (a paper with hunting scenes was admired by the children, but Wright was fortunately able to persuade Dorothy that it was not suitable for a bedroom); the coloured patchwork quilt, though a beautiful piece of work in its way, was

too gay to be pleasing to anyone with an educated eye; some of the ornaments were very valuable, but among them were china ornaments and artificial flowers that were once considered the height of taste, but that are now banished to the nursery or the lumber room.

"It was very kind of you to take so much trouble," said Mrs. Marshall.

"We felt it was our duty," said Elinor solemnly, and in a loud aside she whispered to Dorothy: "The speech."

But Dorothy was not to be persuaded to say any more.

"Have you touched any of the other rooms?" asked their father anxiously.

"No," answered Dorothy.

"Of course we couldn't touch the little morning room," said Marian gravely; "because of the associations." The end of her sentence was lost because Dorothy and Marjory hustled her out of the room to remonstrate with her on her want of tact. Fortunately Mrs. Marshall did not understand, and her husband said to the other children that they had better go downstairs, and see if everything was ready.

When Mr. and Mrs. Marshall came into the dining room they found the girls sitting round the tables. Miss Daly was not present, and declined an

invitation to join them because she did not wish to intrude between parents and children at their first meeting. Mr. Marshall whistled again when he saw the table.

"Are you provisioning for a siege?" he asked.

"We thought you would be hungry," replied Dorothy, rather hurt at his laughing tone.

"So we are, but not sufficiently to make much impression on what you have provided," he returned, surveying the table, in the centre of which stood a large iced cake, while round it were innumerable dishes, cold fowls, a large hot meat pie, a tongue, a ham, meringues, jellies, a trifle, and several other sweets. "Why, children, even if we'd starved for weeks, we couldn't get through this."

"Perhaps they didn't know what I—what we should like," said Mrs. Marshall, afraid the children's feelings might be hurt. "And so they gave us a choice."

"No," said Dorothy, "it wasn't that. We couldn't decide, so we each chose one thing to prevent disagreement."

"Well, however it was, I'm convinced it was all kindly meant," replied Mrs. Marshall. "And now, Frank, will you begin to carve for us? I'm sure we shall all feel much better friends when we are less

hungry," and she took her seat nodding and smiling at the girls, who preserved their stolid demeanour.

Now that her hat and cloak were removed, they could study her more attentively. She was tall and slender. Her pretty hair was fluffy and lay in a short fringe on her forehead. Her face was bright and pleasant, she seemed energetic in her movements, and there was something quick and impulsive about her that generally won her friends wherever she went. Her efforts of friendship met with no great success, however, that evening ; the girls answered her questions as shortly as possible, and listened in silence when she told of her late travels. It was rather a strain for everybody, especially as the whole family seemed to think it would be rude to go to bed, till Mr. Marshall finally sent them off. They submitted passively to the good-night kiss, but after they left the room the door opened softly and Winifred came back.

"Have you forgotten something?" asked her father.

"No," she answered, "I just thought I'd say good-night again," and she slipped her little hand into Mrs. Marshall's, and put up her face for another kiss. Something in her stepmother's face had given her a feeling of 'sorriness' as she confided to Miss Daly,

to whom she always confessed, when she had done something she thought her elder sisters would disapprove of.

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN Mrs. Marshall accepted her present husband she made up her mind that one of her first duties was to make her stepdaughters happy and to win their confidence, so that without interfering too much with their habits she might be to them a friend and an adviser, and not an unwelcome interloper. One of her resolutions was that she would not make a fuss about every trifle, but would yield in little things, in the hope that the girls would feel she must be in the right when she was obliged seriously to oppose their wishes. "Little things can't matter," she told her husband, "and children's happiness is largely made up of little things that seem silly to their elders."

"Do what you like, my dear," answered Mr. Marshall. "You are more likely to understand them than I."

The girls, on the other hand, were very eager to carry out their "mutual toleration" theory, and neither they nor Mrs. Marshall were at all aware that the toleration was all on her side. All the points in question seemed to be insignificant, and no serious matters arose during the first weeks, so that she yielded in nearly every argument, especially as Dorothy's quick decided way of putting things easily carried conviction to one who was less quick in making up her mind, and who was so anxious to win her affections and make her happy. If it happened that Mrs. Marshall remained firm, there was a general feeling that she was not carrying out her share of the bargain, and Dorothy and Marjory especially would go about like martyrs and treat her with forgiving gentleness. This happened very rarely, however, and the result was that as the days went by, Dorothy became more than ever convinced of the infallible correctness of her own judgment. And yet, while the girls disapproved of many of her ways, she was not without influence on them, though it was the kind of influence that is often not realised till it is withdrawn. Another trouble was that they thought her too **frivolous** for a married woman.

True she was only twenty-four, but even if that had not seemed old to them, the mere fact of her being married made them consider it undignified for her to play and romp with them, to run up and down stairs two or three steps at a time, to make jokes and puns, and laugh heartily at her own remarks. They had never known what it was to have grown-up people to play with, and their sense of humour was still very latent, except perhaps in the case of Elinor and Isabel, who could appreciate a joke at times if it was not directed against themselves. They were all unanimous, however, in objecting to their father being called Frank instead of Francis. They had a curious dislike of abbreviations, which Dorothy pronounced affected when Mrs. Marshall called her Dolly.

There was one matter which certainly did annoy Mrs. Marshall, and that was that the girls seemed to think it their duty to see as much of their father as they could. Mr. Marshall generally went to town all day. When his wife went into the hall to see him off in the morning, there were all the girls watching solemnly as she helped him on with his coat and gave him his farewell kiss, which a private family council voted "silly, because what's the good of kissing when you needn't?" In the evening they sat in the drawing-room with her to await his return. They came in to

dinner, and all she could achieve was that at least Winifred went to bed before. The elder girls returned with her to the drawing-room and sat there till their father turned them out. She was so fearful of interfering between father and children that she did not like to suggest that girls of their age do not require late dinner, but she often longed to be without that constant audience. Mr. Marshall never gave the matter a thought, but had he known what his wife felt, he would promptly have made another arrangement, for though he was indolent and easy-going, he could show plenty of energy and decision when he once made up his mind.

With the servants Mrs. Marshall got on very well after one great struggle with Mrs. Wright. The latter had of course had a very easy time of late years, for Mr. Marshall generally dined in town, and consequently she considered late dinners unnecessary. Supper was quite enough; she hadn't time to cook a lot of courses. Most of her grumblings were delivered in the kitchen, for when Mrs. Marshall remained firm in spite of her remonstrances, she merely remarked: "Very well, ma'am, of course you know best, and I'll do all I can, for I want to please you, and maybe you'll kindly overlook mistakes, for I'm not used to cooking big dinners every day."

The result was that the big dinner, which consisted

of soup, fish, joint and sweets, was never in time, that there were long waits between each course, and that something was generally spoilt.

Braced for the interview by the thought that her husband was being made uncomfortable, the young mistress ventured gently to ask Mrs. Wright if she could not be a little more punctual, but the result was always the same: "I'll do my best ma'am, but it's a great deal of work for one woman."

She really thought she was doing her best, and that the work was too much. Mr. Marshall, tired of the perpetual discomfort, declared that he would speak to her severely, so he summoned her to his presence, and walked up and down the room fiercely preparing his speech till she came in. Then he said in a somewhat conciliatory tone: "Oh, Mrs. Wright, don't you think you could manage to get dinner a little bit more punctually?"

"Well, sir, I do my best, but it's a great deal of work for one woman. Still, if I don't please, I can go," answered Mrs. Wright, who would have been much astonished if she had been taken at her word.

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied her master. "We couldn't spare you, could we, Alice?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Marshall.

"But perhaps your mistress could lighten the work a little," continued Mr. Marshall, who till then

had refused to hear of such a thing because one must be firm with servants.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Marshall eagerly; "we could quite well do with the joint **and** the sweets, or soup and a joint."

"Will that suit you better, Mrs. Wright?" asked Mr. Marshall. "Can you get that punctually? We don't want to overwork you, you know."

"I'll **try**, sir," answered Mrs. Wright, refusing to commit herself, and she left the room.

"That's the **way** to manage your servants. Nothing like firmness," said Mr. Marshall, and he went to town very well satisfied with himself. The result of his treatment was as unexpected as it was satisfactory. Having gained her own **way**, Mrs. Wright turned round and did all that was asked of her. The dinner was as usual, everything was well cooked, and there was no delay in the waiting. From that time Mrs. Wright became her mistress's most faithful **aid** and ally, and it would have been a dark day for both if they had been obliged to part.

As for Miss Daly, she simply tried to efface herself. She was most anxious not to be in the way, but she had not sufficient tact to understand when her presence was desirable. She never came out of the schoolroom in the evening, but sat by herself doing long pieces of embroidery and indulging in a sort of

cheerful misery, because she was not wanted by anyone. Mrs. Marshall, who found her a little irritating at times, especially as she was very touchy and took every joke seriously, did her best to make her feel at ease, and at her first At-Home day, for which she had issued cards, she insisted that Miss Daly and the girls should be present. This was not altogether disinterested on her part, for the people she expected were mostly strangers, and Mr. Marshall, who had promised to be at home, was unable to keep his word. There was to be a general election in the summer, and he intended to present himself as a candidate, and as he was really interested in the matter, he was devoting all his time to the interest of his party.

The At-Home day arrived, and was a day of such excitement that lessons were not to be thought of. The girls volunteered to help arrange the flowers, and they set to work with so much energy that ten minutes sufficed to fill all the vases, and when Mrs. Marshall came to look at their work, her heart sank. The flowers were squeezed in tight, the stalks were cut too short, and the colours were arranged in the crudest fashion; very painful to anyone who had an eye for harmony. She did not like to say anything, because the girls were so thoroughly pleased with their work, but she determined that next time she would do it herself, and give them a little lesson as to

the arrangement of flowers. She was not altogether able to hide her feelings, and Marjory said to Dorothy, as they carried the vases to the drawing-room, "She didn't like the way we did it."

"But she praised us," said Dorothy.

"Yes, but she looked as if she hated it," returned Marjory.

"She ought to say what she thinks, then," retorted Dorothy, stopping short. "I shall ask her."

"You'd better not," said Marjory. "After all, it's her own fault if she doesn't, and shows she has no sense of beauty."

Marjory was generally in rather an irritated state of late, though she was not aware of the cause. The fact was that Mrs. Marshall consulted Dorothy a great deal in her desire to find out what the girls liked, and Dorothy was always ready to confer with her, so that Marjory felt set aside. The latent jealousy of her disposition was steadily developing, and she was often very miserable, though nobody knew why.

Mrs. Marshall tried to persuade the girls to wear their hair open, and to put on their dark blue frocks, and though Evelyn eagerly sided with her, the eldest sister had so many plausible reasons why they should keep their hair in plaits and wear the red dresses which were such an eyesore to their stepmother, that she gave in rather than have a serious dispute on such

an important occasion. She herself wore a very pretty light-grey dress, which her family considered rather frivolous, while Miss Daly put on a handsome black silk that her employers had given her. At three o'clock they all assembled in the drawing-room, and sat round in stiff attitudes, talking in solemn whispers. A giggling fit on Elinor's part was quickly snubbed as unseemly.

"Supposing nobody comes," suggested Marion.

"Then we could eat all the cakes," said Isabel cheerfully.

"I should be glad," remarked Evelyn spitefully, "for it's a pity for father's friends to come and see a lot of guys."

"Mamma doesn't look like a guy," objected Winifred, gently stroking her stepmother's hand.

"None of us do," said Dorothy. "But I do think——" The bell rang, and she stopped short. There was a solemn pause, then the parlourmaid brought in a letter.

"Where are Isabel and Elinor?" suddenly asked Winifred. The two, who were seated near the door, had slipped from their chairs and disappeared unnoticed by the others.

"Go and fetch them back, Marian," said Dorothy. Marian had scarcely gone when carriage wheels were heard on the drive. Dorothy, Marjory, and Evelyn

looked at each other, rose from their chairs, and fled.

"Those silly girls," exclaimed Mrs. Marshall. "Oh, Miss Daly, where are you going?"

"To fetch back the girls," gasped Miss Daly, who was trembling all over at the prospect of strangers, and she too vanished as the bell rang, while Mrs. Marshall called after her in agitated tones to return. Winifred too had gone, and as Mrs. Marshall said when she described the scene to her husband, if his friends thought her a perfect idiot it was not to be wondered at, for she was too distracted and upset to talk properly, and too much afraid of being considered an unpleasant stepmother to explain the cause of her agitation, but she made up her mind that another time she would make no attempt to obtain support from the girls and their governess in her intercourse with society.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO THE DENTIST.

THE winter fogs began early that year, and the girls were not able to take the long walks on the Heath to which they were accustomed. Dorothy, however,

insisted on daily walks, and as even on the foggiest days there was generally a short time when the air was less dense, they were seldom confined to the house. Mrs. Marshall had a great dread of being out in the fogs, to which she was unaccustomed, and which made her nervous, so she stayed at home a great deal herself, tried to persuade the girls to do the same, and aroused Dorothy's scorn by being in a fidget till they returned. As they were frequently able to have only half an hour's run they had a great deal of spare time at home, but they never seemed dull, though as far as their mother could see they did nothing at all. She tried to persuade them to work in the afternoon while she read to them or told them stories, but this experiment was not very successful as the books she chose were either too childish for the elder girls or too difficult for the younger ones, and as they persisted in interrupting with silly questions or private conversations, for they were not accustomed to being read to, and found it difficult to follow. Games were more successful, though they could never quite get over the idea that it was undignified for a married woman to run about and get so excited about Blind Man's Buff or Proverbs. The fact was she enjoyed the games almost more than the children, though they were thoroughly happy over them, especially when they found that Dorothy after a time

ceased taking them to task for being silly or affected. They did not know that this was the result of a private conversation between her and her mother, and only Marjory noticed when at a look from Mrs. Marshall, Dorothy stopped short in the reproving words she had begun to say, and the girl herself was scarcely aware that it was not entirely her own amiability that made her so kind to the others.

They were all playing in the schoolroom one dark afternoon, when Marian, who had been rather quiet, began to cry.

"What's the matter, Marian?" asked Mrs. Marshall anxiously.

"Oh, I've got such a dreadful toothache. Oh, I don't know what to do," wailed Marian.

"Poor little girl," exclaimed her mother. "Come here, dear, and let me see. The tooth ought to come out," she added, after she had examined the sufferer's mouth.

"No, no," protested Marian energetically. "I expect it's a cold, and will get better presently."

"Nonsense," said Dorothy. "It had better come out at once. Go and put on your things."

"Indeed, she won't," returned Mrs. Marshall indignantly. "I won't have the poor child taken out in this fog. If you hadn't insisted in taking her this morning, I daresay it would never have come," and

she put her arm round Marian, who leant her head against her mother's shoulder.

"I thought it was best for her," returned Dorothy.

"Yes, you always do think you know best, and you never consider how much suffering you inflict on others," answered Mrs. Marshall. "This should serve as a lesson to you. Hush, Marian dear, don't cry, come with me, and I'll see if I can't cure you," and they went away, leaving a very angry family behind. Marjory raged up and down the room saying all the unpleasant things she could think of about her step-mother. Evelyn also thought it ridiculous to talk like that about Dorothy, and the younger ones decided that Marian was a little humbug.

"I don't care," said Dorothy. "I know what my duty is, and I shall do it. Mamma gets so excited about things that she doesn't always think if she's doing what is best. Now she is treating Marian in the worst possible way for her character, and it will be hard work to undo the harm."

"I'm sure, Mrs. Marshall is doing what she thinks best," gently interposed Miss Daly, who always sat working by the fire, fenced off from danger by a large table when romps were going on.

"Yes, but though you may think a thing is best, it isn't always best," returned Dorothy. "I've known

Marian for twelve years, while mamma has only known her for about ten weeks, so she ought to be guided by me."

Marian spent the rest of the day with Mrs. Marshall, who petted her to her heart's content. Both enjoyed it, for Marian's pain was better, and Mrs. Marshall was very fond of petting, but was rarely allowed to indulge in it as the others objected. Winifred sometimes came in to her to be "loved," as she said, but not often, for though she delighted in it she thought it was wrong, as Dorothy said so.

Mr. Marshall offered Marian five shillings if she would go to the dentist next morning, but she declared that she was all right, and went to bed happy. But when Mrs. Marshall came to see her before going to bed, she found her crying with renewed pain, and spent the greater part of the night with her. Next morning Marian was better, she breakfasted in bed, and afterwards sat in the morning-room, where her dinner was brought to her, so that she should keep quiet and not get into draughts. In the afternoon, Mrs. Marshall, finding she continued better, put her on the couch and went to lie down a little, after looking in at the schoolroom and telling the others not to disturb their sister.

Marian lay curled up on the couch, feeling very

happy and cosy, when the door opened and Dorothy and Marjory came in, in their hats and jackets.

"How's your toothache?" asked Dorothy coldly.

"Much better," answered Marian cheerfully.

"Then you had better get up and come with us," continued Dorothy.

"Mamma said I wasn't to leave the room, for fear of draughts, as the pain might return," replied Marian.

"You are to come with us to the dentist," returned Dorothy, while Marjory held out Marian's hat and jacket.

"I won't," answered Marian. "On no account may I go out, and it's getting foggy again."

"The tooth must come out," replied Dorothy, firmly, "and the sooner the better."

"Father says it will ache till it's out," added Marjory.

"But mamma——"

"Mamma has nothing to do with it," returned Dorothy. "In the first place, she doesn't know how to treat you, and in the second place she is asleep. Come, be quick."

Firmness always subdued Marian, so very reluctantly she put on her things.

"I must run up and get a shawl for my mouth," she said, brightening at the thought of escape.

"There's one on the couch," said Marjory.

"It's so ugly. I'll get my white one," said Marian, clinging to her chance of flight.

"Quite good enough for a foggy day," answered Dorothy, wrapping it round her. "Come." And the hapless victim was led off. The fog was not very thick, and the girls walked rapidly towards their destination, a dentist whose plate they had noticed in their walks. At the door Marian made one more effort to soften her sisters' hearts. Crying and shivering she was led into the dentist's room. Dorothy explained what they had come for. The dentist was very gentle with Marian. After he had looked in her mouth he gave her a little sal volatile, and then persuaded her to let him have another look. There was a piercing yell, and the dentist held up the offending tooth. "There," he said. "Now don't cry, it's all over, and you'll have no more pain."

It took some time before Marian could calm herself, but when she realised that all was over she was very pleased.

"You see," said Dorothy, "it was not as bad as you thought."

"You say that because it wasn't you, and you never had a tooth out. It was agony," answered Marian.

"Keep the shawl up well, and don't talk going home," said the dentist, as he let them out. The fog was denser again, and the air was chill and unpleasant.

For a while they walked in silence, then Marian said: "Now I shall get my five shillings."

"You haven't deserved them," returned Dorothy.

"Father never said I was to deserve them, he only said I was to have my tooth out," retorted Marian.

"You mustn't talk," said Marjory, but Marian was so happy at being freed from pain that she kept on chattering till they reached home. As they entered the hall, Mrs. Marshall came downstairs.

"It's out, it's out!" cried Marian, running to meet her. "And I was so brave."

Mrs. Marshall turned to Dorothy in great astonishment. "You don't mean to say you took that poor child out into this fog?" she asked severely.

"Somebody had to do it, and you seemed so upset by one bad night, that I thought it best to take her."

"You are a disobedient girl," said Mrs. Marshall, really angry. "How should a little girl like you always know what is best? I told you not to go to Marian. I do hope, dear, you haven't caught cold. Come to the morning-room. I will get you warm and give you your tea."

Dorothy was as angry as her stepmother, whom she considered unduly interfering, and Marjory of course sided with her sister. Marian was divided between pride at her own heroism, and grief at Dorothy's brutality, and when her face began to swell

up, she felt really cheered. Mrs. Marshall, when once her anger was over, regretted that she had spoken so sharply. She had a long talk with Dorothy, in which she tried to make her see that she was not always the best judge, but she did not effect much, for Dorothy persisted in maintaining that if Marian had kept up the shawl her face wouldn't have swelled, that a swelled face didn't matter, and that it was a blessing that the tooth was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

LESSONS.

"Miss Daly hopes you'll excuse her staying in bed this morning, because she's got one of her bad headaches," said Dorothy, one morning at breakfast.

"Oh, poor Miss Daly," exclaimed Mrs. Marshall. "I am sorry."

"No lessons," cried Isabel cheerfully. "Of course, I'm sorry too, but good comes out of evil."

"A truly philosophical spirit," said Mr. Marshall.

"I hope the thought will console Miss Daly. What shall you do with them all day, Alice?"

"We can amuse ourselves," said Elinor. "We don't want help."

"I think I will take them for lessons," remarked Mrs. Marshall, thoughtfully. "There have been so many **extra** holidays."

"I hope you know what you're letting yourself in for," remarked Mr. Marshall gravely.

"I used to help in my mother's school," she answered, "so it won't be as difficult for me as it might be for you."

"I shouldn't think of undertaking it," he returned, laughing "I'm much too shaky myself in my facts."

"It will be rather a good thing," said Dorothy. "Miss Daly is always wishing you would examine us, to see whether you are satisfied with us and her."

"I can't answer for you, but of course your father and I are satisfied with Miss Daly," replied Mrs. Marshall quickly.

"Don't you think a walk would do us more good?" asked Elinor. "It's not so very foggy, and you've never seen the inundations on the Heath in this light."

"I've never seen them at all," returned her mother. "I never knew there had been any floods."

"Who ever said there had been?" asked Elinor,

rather pertly, for she was not in her most amiable mood. "I said inundations, and that means the ups and downs."

"Undulations is what she's aiming at," said her father, rising. "Alice, I should suggest setting her the dictionary to learn by heart. Good-bye, chicks. Behave yourselves, and in the distant future you shall go to the pantomime."

As soon as he had gone Mrs. Marshall sent the children to the schoolroom to get their books ready, while she went to see Miss Daly, and to give Mrs. Wright her orders for the day. She was really anxious to see what the girls knew, for they seemed to her very ignorant.

Dorothy, who was rather pleased that Mrs. Marshall was going to teach them, accompanied her to give her advice in various matters. Marjory resented it as interfering. She was always finding fault with what her stepmother did, twisting the most innocent acts and expressions till to her jealous mind they seemed wrong and unkind. Now, she said, standing by the table: "I believe mamma wants to find out how little we know."

"It won't take her long to find that out," observed Evclyn calmly, seating herself in an easy chair by the fire, and settling down to a book she had pulled from behind the cushion.

"She wants to be a sort of spy on Miss Daly in her absence," went on Marjory discontentedly, opening and shutting a book.

"What a horrid mind you've got!" cried Marian, who was searching in the book cupboard. "Poor mamma does her best to please us, and you always make nasty remarks. I shall try hard to please her this morning."

"I shan't," put in Elinor, seating herself on the table, and swinging her legs. "I think it's cheek of 'Alice dear' to give us lessons when we want a holiday."

"You oughtn't to call her that," said Marian reprovingly, while Isabel giggled.

"I shall, I shall, I shall," chanted Elinor. "I'll say it to her face. I've as good a right to call her so as father."

"You daren't!" cried Marian.

"You see," answered Elinor.

"Do be quick, Marian," said Winifred impatiently. "I want to come to the cupboard."

"What do you want?" asked Marian, who was increasing the disorder of the cupboard by her wild search.

"My doll's dress; I put it in one of the volumes of the encyclopædia, to iron it," answered Winifred,

bringing out her long word very slowly and carefully.

"Aren't some people proud of themselves?" scoffed Elinor.

"It would be better if you were as particular in speaking," retorted Marjory.

"It would be better if Winifred learnt to read," began Isabel, but a crash stopped her. Winifred had tried to push past Marian, and together they upset a pile of books. Winifred, nothing daunted, proceeded to sit down on them while she searched through the twelve volumes of the big encyclopædia, and Marian, seizing a small book, slipped it into her pocket and went and sat down at the table. Mrs. Marshall came in with Dorothy.

"Oh, children," she said, "I cannot teach in such an untidy room. Those books must be picked up and put back properly."

"It's no use," explained Dorothy. "We've tried being tidy, and we've tried being untidy, and we find we lose much more time in tidying up than in looking for things."

"That must be a mistake, Dorothy, but anyhow, I wish those books to be put in order," returned Mrs. Marshall.

"Then Marjory had better do it," replied Dorothy. "She's the tidiest."

"I think whoever pulled them down ought to put back," was the answer, whereupon Marjory, in her perverse frame of mind, started putting them back.

"Did you pull them out?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"I did," answered Marian; but Marjory continued her task, muttering that Dorothy had told her to. Presently the room was in order, and all the girls came and sat down at the table, all, that is to say, except Winifred, who was dressing her doll in the recovered dress, and came very reluctantly when she was called, and Evelyn, who was absorbed in her book.

"Evelyn is setting us all a good example," said Mrs. Marshall, pleased to see that at least one of her stepdaughters seemed studiously inclined, though a little surprised that it should be Evelyn, who always struck her as the most indolent and shallow of the seven. The others laughed.

"I don't approve of Evelyn's reading," said Dorothy. "I think you ought to interfere."

Mrs. Marshall went up to the reader, and bent over her. Evelyn looked up. "It's a lovely book," she said. "Sir Reginald and Lady Constantia have just gone away together. Can't I wait with lessons till I've found out if Lady Constantia's husband fights a duel with Sir Reginald? I think Sir Reginald's meant for the villain, but I do like him, he's so handsome and bold."

"Where did you get that book, Evelyn?" asked Mrs. Marshall, much horrified.

"From the housemaid," was the answer.

"It is not a fit book for you, Evelyn dear," said her mother, gently taking it from her. "I will give it back, and if you want to read, I will get you some pretty stories."

"I don't care for girls' books," returned Evelyn. "They're so dull. Mayn't I finish this one? It's getting so exciting."

"No, dear," answered Mrs. Marshall. "I'd rather you didn't. Now take your seat. I think," she went on, sitting down at the head of the table, "that we will keep to your time-table."

"We have history, French, and arithmetic this morning," said Dorothy.

"As it's so late, we'll leave the French," said Mrs. Marshall, "and take the history."

"She doesn't know any French," whispered Elinor to Isabel, who giggled, and had to be called to order.

"I will give the younger ones sums to do while the elder ones have history," went on Mrs. Marshall.

"Oh, no," exclaimed Dorothy, opening a book, "that's not the way we manage. We each read in turn out of Mrs. Markham. This is where we are."

"Quite at the beginning?" asked Mrs. Marshall, surprised.

"Yes, we've been through it twice, and now we're going through it again to ensure thoroughness, Miss Daly says."

"I'll ask you a few questions first," said Mrs. Marshall, and she proceeded to do so, but she did not find the result very satisfactory, and Evelyn declared that you couldn't be expected to read and attend at the same time. Marjory resented the questioning because she thought it was an attack on Miss Daly's system, for the latter only asked questions on specially-prepared passages, and not "all over the place," as Marjory expressed it. As a tacit defence of her teacher, she therefore refused to answer any questions, though she knew many of them, and it did not occur to her that Miss Daly might be blamed for her apparent ignorance. Dorothy took more pains, though she did not approve of the innovation, and Marian at least tried to answer, though she made the wildest shots. Elinor and Isabel could only giggle, and Winifred, having finished the copy her mother had set her, disappeared under the table to dress her doll.

"Come here, Winifred, and show me your copy," said Mrs. Marshall, when she discovered what the child was doing. "Oh, my dear little girl," she ex-

claimed, as she looked at the blotted page, "can't you do better than this?"

"Well, I suppose I could," answered Winifred cheerfully.

"But why don't you, my dear?" asked Mrs. Marshall. "It's such a pity, when little girls don't try their hardest."

"Why, you see I'm not very fond of work," returned Winifred frankly, as she slipped her little hand into her stepmother's and leant against her; "but it doesn't matter, because I'm so young."

"We think she ought not to be forced too much," said Dorothy. "You need not trouble about her at all."

"My dear Dorothy, that has nothing to do with the matter. It's a question of trying, not of forcing," returned Mrs. Marshall, a little annoyed at the interference. "Now, Winifred, will you try again?"

"I'll try," answered Winifred, "but of course I must not be overworked." She sat down again, and began to write more carefully, while Mrs. Marshall told the others to get their slates and arithmetic books.

"You must hear our tables first," said Dorothy, and Mrs. Marshall did so, but as she questioned instead of taking them straight through, the class rebelled

"You don't do anything right," complained Elinor crossly.

"There are different ways of teaching, Elinor," replied Mrs. Marshall.

"Yes, but your way doesn't suit us as well as Miss Daly's," said Marjory.

"When you're used to one way, you can't suddenly change to another," added Dorothy, and there was sufficient truth in her remark to make Mrs. Marshall feel rather annoyed. "Suppose you go on to-day as we're used to, for after all Miss Daly must know which is the best way to treat us. Perhaps you had better just set us our sums."

Mrs. Marshall had her serious doubts about Miss Daly's wisdom, but she would not say so, and hiding her annoyance at Dorothy's patronising tone, she took the book and gave the class some sums to work out while she heard Winifred read. Winifred knew her letters, and when she took pains, she knew that c-a-t did not spell dog, but beyond this her knowledge did not extend. Mrs. Marshall did her best to arouse her ambition by telling her of a little girl of six who could read long stories to her blind grandmother, but she didn't see the point as she had no blind grandmother, and as Dorothy and Marjory both took her part, Mrs. Marshall resolved that she would speak to her in

private. It was nearly twelve, so she thought she would look at the sums and then dismiss the class. The two eldest girls had done fairly well; Evelyn had given the matter up as a bad job. Marian's answers were correct, but Elinor and Isabel had been playing at noughts and crosses instead of working.

"Really, children, I think you are most tiresome," exclaimed Mrs. Marshall.

Elinor looked up with a provoking grin. "Don't excite yourself, Alice dear, you'll manage better next time."

"Elinor, you must not speak to me like that."

"I shall speak exactly as I like," returned Elinor calmly.

"You must beg my pardon, or you must leave the room," said Mrs. Marshall, trying to control herself.

"When she's like that it's best to leave her alone till she comes to her senses," said Dorothy. "It's no use arguing with her."

"Will you kindly leave me to settle the matter, Dorothy?" said Mrs. Marshall sharply. "Elinor, leave the room."

"Shan't," replied Elinor. "Leave the room yourself if you don't like to be with me."

"You'll only make her worse," began Dorothy, when the door opened, and Mary, who thought the children were alone, came in. She took in matters at

a glance, for she knew and could manage the children thoroughly.

"Has Miss Elinor been rude to you, Ma'am?" she asked.

"Very rude, Mary, and I wish her to leave the room."

Mary took Elinor by the arm, and without saying a word led her from the room. Mrs. Marshall gave a sigh of relief, and was about to speak to the others, when Marian uttered a loud shriek. "It's that horrid little Isabel pinching me," she said.

"I'm not," said Isabel, emerging from under the table with a book in her hand, which she handed to her mother. "Look, that's why Marian's sums were right."

Mrs. Marshall looked at it. "Oh, Marian," she said, "did you look at the key?" She took up Marian's slate and found that though the answers were correct, the working was wrong. Marian burst into tears. "I wanted to please you," she said. "And I never, never get my sums right."

"But Marian, you couldn't think it would please me if you cheated."

"I don't call it cheating when nobody's hurt by it," sobbed Marian.

"But, my dear little girl," said Mrs. Marshall

gently, as she stroked the sobbing child's hair, " You were trying to deceive me."

" But **only** to please you," repeated Marian.

" It's ridiculous to cry like that," said Dorothy, " like a baby."

" I'm very glad she does cry," replied Mrs. Marshall, " it shows she is sorry."

" Yes, truly I'm sorry I've made you angry, and I'll never cheat again, if you don't like it," said Marian, putting up her face for a kiss.

Mrs. Marshall was only half-satisfied, for it seemed to her Marian did not rightly understand where her fault lay, but she kissed her and forgave her, putting off further discussion to the time when she could speak to her without the presence of the others. She told the girls they could put their books away, and made them do so properly, and then Mary came in with a proposal that pleased everyone.

" The weather's too foggy for walking this afternoon," she said; " would you mind, ma'am, if the young ladies had a half-holiday and came and had tea with me?"

" How lovely!" cried Isabel, and Mrs. Marshall, who as Mary perceived was thoroughly worn out, gladly gave her consent.

" But Elinor cannot go unless she apologises," she added.

"Oh, she'll do that soon enough now," cried Isabel, and she ran out to find her sister.

"You must give us the money for the buns," said Winifred.

"Yes," said Dorothy. "You see, there are so many of us that we provide the buns. Mary provides the bread and butter. It means a lot, but she'd feel inhospitable if we didn't let her."

Mary laughed and left the room, and Mrs. Marshall promised the money. "I'm sorry I had to speak so sharply to you this morning, Dorothy," she said, gently putting her arm round the girl's shoulder, "but you see, you are a little fond of interfering."

"But only because I understand the children better than you, and want to help you," returned Dorothy, disengaging herself, and Elinor came in, still looking rather sullen. She muttered something that was intended as an apology, and Mrs. Marshall readily promised to overlook her rudeness this time.

"I'm not really sorry," observed Elinor, as the weary teacher left the room, "only, of course, I want to go to Mary's."

Dorothy and Marjory both began to lecture her, but she refused to listen, and ran away, while Dorothy remarked that it was a great pity mamma had so little idea of managing children. It would have been much better for the whole family if Mrs. Marshall had been

less eager to soothe Dorothy's feelings, and had refused to allow Elinor to go with the others, for the latter now felt as if she had conquered, and the former was strengthened in the sort of pitying contempt that she unconsciously entertained for her stepmother's weak character. Poor Mrs. Marshall herself was in despair that day, for she began to realise more fully the position of affairs, and to feel how little she could guide her stepdaughters, and what a wall separated them from each other, in spite of their apparently friendly relations; and she resolved to write to her mother for advice and help, though till now she had avoided telling her anything unpleasant. She did not tell her husband of her troubles, but she did consult him about the children's lessons. He told her not to worry, they'd learn as much as they needed. "For," said he, "we couldn't send away poor Miss Daly."

"No," replied Mrs. Marshall, "but we might suggest that she needs assistance."

"Yes," remarked Mr. Marshall, a little doubtfully, "that might do. But after all, it's so near Christmas now that we might just as well go on like this till the New Year."

"So we might," said Mrs. Marshall, brightening up, for she, too, was not sorry to put off the evil moment. "Yes, that will be best; then we needn't upset Miss Daly and the girls yet."

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS.

MISS DALY was able to resume her work next day. She was rather anxious to know what Mrs. Marshall thought of her pupils, but the latter avoided the subject, and Miss Daly did not venture to ask. Marian gave her a description of what had happened, concealing her own misdeeds, however, while Dorothy contented herself with informing her governess that she didn't think Mamma understood how to teach, and the matter gradually dropped. A few days later, as they sat at lunch, Mrs. Marshall asked the children what they usually did at Christmas.

"Nothing much," answered Dorothy. "We go to church, and afterwards we have a big dinner, and father gives us each a sovereign."

"Don't you try to make others happy, who have not so many luxuries as you?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"I don't think we have many luxuries," said Evelyn.

"Why, Evelyn, you have a comfortable home, and as much as you want to eat, and nice clothes and toys."

"I don't think much of the clothes," returned Evelyn. "I should like rustling silks and satins, and soft rich furs, and purple and fine linen, and comfortable chairs, and carpets in which your foot sinks as though in a bed of moss, and dainty little dinners, and chocolate in bed in the morning." She sat bolt upright in her excitement.

"What book did you get that out of?" asked Marjory.

"Evelyn, have you been reading novels again?" inquired her mother.

"Not since you took mine away," replied Evelyn. "But that's what I call luxuries," and she sat back in her chair with a sigh.

"It would be nice to have the chocolate," observed Isabel.

"But girls, think of all the poor children with nothing to eat and no warm clothes," said Mrs. Marshall, returning to the original subject.

"I don't like to think of them," said Evelyn. "I saw in a book that sad thoughts were bad for the digestion."

"That's silly," remarked Dorothy. "One ought to think of unpleasant things because it's good for one, and makes one contented."

"But that's just what I don't wish," said Mrs. Marshall. "I want you to feel discontented **at** the

thought of the poor starving children, and to wish to help them."

"But we can't," said Marian. "Miss Daly wouldn't like us to go and talk to strange children because of measles and whooping cough."

"I shouldn't like it either, Marian," replied Mrs. Marshall. "You are much too young for that, but I thought we might get up an entertainment for some school of poor children or at the workhouse. I thought you might like to act a little play, perhaps, and then you must have some old toys you don't want that we could mend and put on a Christmas tree, and I think you might save a little of your pocket money for nuts and cakes. Another year we will begin earlier, and then you can all knit comforters and mittens."

"I should be pleased to knit some now," put in Miss Daly.

"That would be good of you," said Mrs. Marshall.

"We'll look at the toys after dinner," said Dorothy.

"After tea would do," suggested Mrs. Marshall, "and then it will not interfere with your lessons."

"We'd better have a half-holiday," returned Dorothy. "Then Miss Daly can go and get her wools by daylight."

"That would be an advantage," remarked Miss

Daly, "as the time is so short before Christmas. Dorothy is always so practical."

After that Mrs. Marshall did not like to say anything more, and as soon as the meal was over she was marched off to the schoolroom, though usually she aroused Dorothy's contempt by lying down for half an hour or so. She sat down in the big chair by the fire, while the children piled up a great heap of toys before her, dolls, furniture, tea sets, mechanical toys, soldiers, etc., in various stages of dilapidation. She helped them to sort the things according to their condition, and when this was done, she re-examined the toys that could be mended, and told the children what should be done. They were all very interested in the matter, and after tea sat round the schoolroom table helping to mend what was mendable, while they talked quicker than they worked, and Miss Daly sat by the fire and knitted as if for dear life. Mrs. Marshall showed how the work was to be done, and Dorothy gave her opinion, and was quite unmoved when she proved to be mistaken. Marjory plodded on silently, working very neatly, and accomplishing more than all the others put together; Evelyn mended one doll's chair and spent the rest of the time admiring her work, Marian made a great deal of fuss over very little, while Isabel and Elinor were very industrious, but unfortunately did most of their work

wrong, for instance, gumming a chair-leg on to a small horse, and then, of course, when the mistake was discovered, it took them a long time to recover from their amusement. As for Winifred, she was so absorbed in finding long lost treasures that she did not think of working. They were all so busy that they quite forgot the time, till the door opened and Mr. Marshall came in.

"I thought you were lost," he said, "and was just going to send for the police when Jane told me you were here."

"We're so busy, you see," said Winifred.

"So I see. What's it all about?"

Seven tongues began to explain at once, so it took some time before he understood. "Well," he said, when the matter was made clear to him, "I've no objection, and I know of a school for poor girls which will just suit your purpose, but I must protest against the play."

"Don't you like them to act?" asked Mrs. Marshall, a little surprised.

"I've no objection to acting, but I think when I've told you a little story, you'll agree with me," he answered.

"But, father, we were mere babies then!" cried Dorothy.

"Ha, ha! conscience pricks. Well, I acknow-

ledge they were younger, for it was a few years back, when we lived at Elmfields. Mr. East, the vicar, thought it would be very nice for all concerned, if the squire's daughters acted a play to amuse the school children. The squire's daughters readily agreed, they learned their parts, they had their dresses made, they rehearsed, they acted very badly, but they did their best. The afternoon arrived. The first part of the entertainment was a concert. Then came a pause. Then I was sent for. There stood the seven actors in floods of tears, refusing to go on, and the end of the matter was we had to improvise an entertainment, while they went home disgraced."

The girls protested that they would do better now, but Mrs. Marshall remembered her At Home day, and said perhaps tea and games and the tree would be enough, and Mr. Marshall upheld her. Dorothy was rather annoyed. "Mamma is so easily influenced," she said afterwards to Marjory. Meanwhile Mr. Marshall promised that as he had shortened the entertainment he would contribute to its funds.

"You'd better give it at once, or you'll forget," said Elinor. "You know you are rather obvious."

"I suppose you mean oblivious," he returned, laughing. "Well, how much do you want?"

Dorothy said £10, but Mrs. Marshall decided that they would make a list of what was wanted, and that

they must not be extravagant. "And now I must go and dress for dinner," she said, rising, at which remark Dorothy looked a little scornful, for she considered it dreadfully silly to dress so often, whereas Evelyn thought it delightful, and unless Dorothy watched her well would step upstairs and put on a lace collar.

"How is your election going on, father?" asked Marian, as he turned to open the door for his wife.

"Very well thank you, so far," he answered, "but it doesn't come off till the summer; we're only preparing the way now."

"When will mamma have to do the kissing," asked Isabel, "and will the people wash first?"

"The kissing?" asked her father, astonished. "Whom is she to kiss?"

Isabel pulled out a scrapbook, in which there was a copy of the picture where the Duchess of Devonshire is represented as bribing an elector with a kiss. "There," she said triumphantly.

Mr. Marshall laughed. "That was long ago," he said. "People are not allowed to bribe now."

"Then what makes people take one man rather than another?" asked Dorothy. "A man on the Heath said it was all done by bribery and corruption."

"Why, Dorothy, if the electors choose me, that's because I'm such a clever amiable man, but if they

choose my opponent it's because they're wanting in intellect, in my opinion at least. But I can't explain more now, for it's five minutes to seven, and if you don't go and wash, your knives and forks will stick to your gummy hands."

The children did not lose their interest in the promised school treat, and really did their best to help according to their different capacities. It was the first time they had undertaken anything of the sort, for though they were ready enough to help others, when the way was shown them they had no instinctive impulse in that direction. Mrs. Marshall, besides helping, and in fact doing most of the work, had private conferences with each child respecting presents for the others, and there was a delightful air of mystery about the house. Anyone who came suddenly into the room where the younger girls were, was sure to be received with shrieks, for they insisted on buying their presents very early and spent their spare time in contemplating their beauties, while Winifred told each of her sisters what she had bought for her, stipulating, however, that she was to forget all about it before Christmas.

Mrs. Marshall made up her mind that they would have a tree for themselves, but as she wanted it to be a surprise, she only took Dorothy into her confidence, and they had many private conferences and secret

expeditions. On one occasion they went to town together, were caught in a fog, and owing to Dorothy's obstinacy lost their way entirely, till the fog suddenly cleared off and they discovered that they were walking in the wrong direction. Mrs. Marshall had been very excited and rather upset, much to Dorothy's disgust, for said she: "What's the use of making a fuss about what can't be helped? Anybody could have gone wrong in that fog."

"She's not got a very strong character," replied Marjory, who grew more irritated and discontented the more Dorothy was with Mrs. Marshall, and did all she could to disparage her stepmother and keep her sister from her, though she would have been horrified had she been fully conscious of her motive.

The Christmas festivities were a great success. On the afternoon of Christmas Eve the poor girls came, and when Mrs. Marshall saw her stepdaughters' behaviour she rejoiced that she had taken her husband's advice about the play. They stood in corners, and would not talk; when she called them to help distribute the presents they poked them into their visitors' hands and fled, and they utterly refused to join the games in which their visitors indulged. Mrs. Marshall worked hard, she led the games, and was so merry and full of fun that the little strangers clung round her and lost their shyness. After their depar-

ture the girls chatted freely enough, and were evidently under the impression that they had largely contributed to the success of the evening, for they were much astonished when Mrs. Marshall said she wished they had conquered their shyness and joined in the fun.

"I think we did all that could be required of us," said Dorothy indignantly. "I think it is better to be quiet than to romp too much."

"You needn't do that, and you mustn't think I'm scolding you dear. I only thought you might have joined the games as I did," returned Mrs. Marshall. "You see Miss Daly didn't mind playing."

"No," replied Marjory. "Miss Daly played like an elderly person, but if you find fault with Dorothy I must say what I think, that you behaved like a young girl, instead of a married woman," and she ran out of the room.

Mrs. Marshall burst out laughing. "I'm sorry if I behave in too juvenile a fashion to please you," she said, "but I do feel young, though I am married."

The next day with its revelations of mysteries was very delightful, and as there were no strangers present nobody felt shy, and Mrs. Marshall escaped reproof for putting a paper cap out of a cracker on her head. The presents were given in the evening, because of the tree, which was a great pleasure to all. Her

present to the girls consisted of very pretty white silk dresses, and though Dorothy was not quite certain that they ought to wear them, even she was pleased, and Evelyn was simply delighted. She disappeared for a time, and when she returned she had unplaited her hair and put on her new dress, and sat for the rest of the evening fancying herself the heroine of a romance, and not in the least annoyed by her father's teasing and her sisters' scorn.

"Well," said Winifred, as she came to give her mother her good-night kiss, "in all my life I've never had such a lovely Christmas, and I'm glad you're so jolly, though Dorothy thinks it wrong when you're old and married, but I think I shall be like you."

"That's right, Winifred," said her father. "I dare-say when Dorothy comes to be as old as your mother, which isn't so very old, by the bye, she'll look on life as a much more cheerful affair than she does now. Isn't that so, my little girl?" he went on, pulling Dorothy's plait by way of caress.

"I didn't hear what you said," she answered, starting and looking up. "I was thinking what fun we'd had and how nice it was without that horrid little George. We do all get on well together on the mutual toleration plan, don't we, father?"

"Oh, excellently," replied her father, laughing. "It's touching how we all give in to one another."

"Yes," answered Dorothy, seriously. "You see we study each other, and it is a good thing for mamma that she has me to tell her everybody's tastes."

Whereupon her parents burst out laughing, and her father said that he thought that the best place for studying each other at eleven o'clock at night was bed, and that he was going to put the lights out.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT OF ADVENTURES.

UP till now Mr. and Mrs. Marshall had gone out very little, as the fogs made it impossible to accept invitations at a distance. After Christmas the weather became warm and dirty, but there were no fogs, so that they were able to fulfil a long standing engagement to dine with some friends of Mr. Marshall's at Kensington on New Year's Eve. The girls were rather annoyed, for they had come to think that it was the duty of parents to stay at home and amuse their children, especially at that season of the year, and it was with gloomy faces that they watched them depart.

"It must be lovely to go out in such fine dresses," sighed Evelyn, when they returned to the schoolroom, where Miss Daly sat knitting as usual.

"Evelyn, you really are too vain," said Dorothy. "It's ridiculous."

"I must say mamma rather encourages her," observed Marjory.

"I know," replied Dorothy, "but Evelyn ought to know better."

"If I don't, it's not for want of being told," returned Evelyn, calmly, adding in contemplative tones, "I don't think grey silk would suit me as well as it does her."

Dorothy's lecture was cut short by the announcement of supper, and they went into the dining-room, where they found that Mrs. Marshall had provided various little treats by way of consolation, among others some boxes of crackers, and as some of the latter contained musical toys, there was soon a great uproar in the room.

"I'm going to sit up all night," said Elinor, when they were back in the schoolroom, where they generally preferred to sit when they were alone.

"So shall I, "so shall I," cried the others.

"Will you, Miss Daly?" asked Marian.

"Yes, dear, of course if you wish it," answered

Miss Daly, who was generally ready for bed at half-past nine.

The time passed slowly without Mrs. Marshall, for though they would not have acknowledged it, and indeed were hardly conscious of it, they were now very dependent on her for their amusement. She was so full of ideas and jokes, and knew so many games, and even Dorothy while feeling superior, really enjoyed the times when her mother played with them. They began to grow very sleepy, and when at half-past ten Winifred was found nestling against her governess sound asleep, while Elinor and Isabel were yawning piteously, Miss Daly suggested that they should change their minds. They objected at first, but finally she and the three youngest girls went to bed. The others would not go, but pretended to feel very lively and gay.

"I shall go to midnight service," said Dorothy, suddenly, as the bells rang out. "Who's coming with me?"

"I am," cried Marjory eagerly.

"I'm not," said Evelyn, shivering and stretching herself. "It's too cold, and I'm sure you ought not to go alone, at this hour. Mamma will not think it right."

"I am quite able to decide what is right," returned Dorothy haughtily; "and as to its being cold—why,

it's as hot as a summer evening. Will you come, Marian?"

Marian didn't know. She wanted to, and she didn't want to. Finally she went to put on her things, but when she came down, she changed her mind again and said she would stay at home. So Dorothy and Marjory went off alone.

When Mr. and Mrs. Marshall came home in the pouring rain at about half-past one in the morning they found two shivering forms crouching under the porch for shelter.

"At last," cried one of them, rising up and speaking joyfully.

"Dorothy—Marjory!" exclaimed Mr. Marshall in utter astonishment.

"Good gracious, girls, what are you doing here at this time of night?" cried Mrs. Marshall, hurrying out of the fly without waiting for her husband's umbrella.

"Wait till we're inside," said Mr. Marshall, as he took out his latchkey and opened the door. While he locked up the house, Mrs. Marshall took the girls into the study, where the fire was burning, and made them take off their hats and jackets.

"Where have you been, and why are you not warmly wrapped up?" she asked.

"We've been to midnight service, and it was warm

and fine when we went," answered Dorothy, warming her hands.

"By yourselves!" exclaimed Mrs. Marshall, who had thrown off her mantle and stood opposite the shivering culprits in her elegant evening dress. "Frank," she said, as her husband came in, "they've been by themselves to midnight service."

"Didn't the servants know?" he asked.

"We only made up our minds all of a sudden after Miss Daly and the little ones had gone to bed," answered Dorothy. "And we couldn't make anyone hear though we rang and rang and rang."

Mrs. Marshall looked grave. "It was very wrong, very wrong indeed," she said. "But we will speak of it to-morrow, for now you must hurry into bed, and I will boil some water on my spirit lamp so that your father can mix you each a little hot claret and water. Then perhaps you will not take cold."

The girls declared they would not touch the claret, and went upstairs very angry that they should be blamed, and very cold and miserable.

Mrs. Marshall went to her room to boil the water, but when she opened the door she cried out so loudly that her husband came running upstairs. The light was turned on full, the candles on the dressing table were alight. In an armchair near the fire, placed so that it was in full view of the large mirror, sat



"IN AN ARM-CHAIR . . . SAT EVELYN, FAST ASLEEP."

Evelyn, fast asleep. She had on a white silk blouse of Mrs. Marshall's, which was arranged so as to leave her arms and neck bare, and she had draped some lace so as to hide the pins and the looseness of the blouse, which of course was too big for her. One of Mrs. Marshall's embroidered white underskirts made a fine skirt with a train, and on her neck and arms and in her hair she wore as many of her mother's jewels as there was room for. Her hair of course waved loose about her, one hand hung down by the side of the chair, the other lay in her lap and held an open book.

"How she startled me," whispered Mrs. Marshall. "Doesn't she look lovely?"

"The monkey's pretty enough," laughed Mr. Marshall. "Do you see what she's been up to? Playing the grand lady out of a novel. I wonder what she's got hold of." He stole gently up to her and took away the book without waking her. "H'm," he said. "Do you allow such books in the school-room, Alice?"

Mrs. Marshall was horrified when she looked at the volume. "Where can she have got it," she exclaimed. "Oh, dear, what else shall we discover?"

"Nothing more to-night," answered Mr. Marshall, as he shook Evelyn to wake her. "We'll get them all

off to bed, and then we'll retire ourselves, and leave all further scolding and revelations till to-morrow."

It was very difficult to wake her, and she did not seem to realise where she was, so that Mrs. Marshall was obliged to help her into bed. Meanwhile Mr. Marshall had prepared the hot wine and water, but the girls had locked their door and declared they were all right and couldn't be bothered to get up and open the door. So they were left in peace, and soon the whole household was asleep. Mrs. Marshall was too tired to get up to breakfast next morning, and the rest of the family came down so late that Mr. Marshall, who had an appointment in the West End, was able to go away and leave all the reprobation to his wife with a good conscience. Nobody felt inclined for lessons, and Miss Daly readily granted the wish of the three younger girls and took them for a walk on the parade. This was a great treat to all four, as they could remain for any length of time with their faces glued to the shop windows, while if Dorothy went with them no loitering was allowed. Evelyn went into the study, drew the couch close to the fire, lay down, and soon fell asleep. Dorothy and Marjory were in the schoolroom. The former was none the worse for her escapade, the latter, who was less strong, had a headache and a sore throat, which it was her one

desire to hide from the rest of the world. Presently Marian came in.

"Is mamma up yet?" asked Dorothy.

"No," answered Marian. "At least, she's in her room still."

"She does give way," remarked Dorothy, and there was a moment's silence.

"I don't think mamma ought to complain to others about us when she pretends all the while to be satisfied with us," said Marian, suddenly.

"I don't see what she's got to complain about," returned Dorothy. "We do all we can to make her happy, and we are just as obedient to her as we are to father."

"She does complain, though," answered Marian.

"How do you know?" asked Marjory.

"Well," replied Marian, with a little hesitation, "I went into her sitting-room for a piece of writing paper, and on the floor—no, in the paper-basket, I found this piece of letter."

This was not quite the truth, for Marian had gone to her stepmother's table in order to pry about, and she found the letter in Mrs. Marshall's writing-case, which was left unlocked.

Dorothy took the paper from Marian without thinking of what she was doing, for she was too honest to read deliberately what was not intended for her,

and Marjory read over her shoulder. The letter ran as follows:—

“And now as to what you tell me about the children. I always thought you took too optimistic a view and did not sufficiently appreciate the difficulties that lay before you, but now that they are beginning to dawn upon you, you must not grow impatient and discouraged. Remember that you have to fight against the influence of years of comparative neglect. Your theory of giving in about trifles is a very good one if it can be carried out, but you must remember that children's lives are mostly made up of what seem trifles to us, and it requires most careful discrimination to find out what may be overlooked and what must be firmly dealt with. You know I always told you that your chief fault in dealing with our girls was your fear of hurting their feelings. I am inclined to put this down to weakness in your character, a certain pusillanimity, which makes you shrink from arousing their dislike. But I think you wrong, for as long as you are firm and consistent, you may anger them, but your reproof will not rankle. Respect their feelings, certainly, but don't wrap them in cotton-wool. I shall soon be with you now, and then I shall be able to study the girls, and I do hope we may be able to work together for their good. You see, as the cat of the German proverb cannot quit her mousing, so the old schoolma'am cannot desist from lecturing. With regard to Dorothy——”

Here the paper ended. Dorothy had grown red with anger. “It's from her mother, I suppose,” she said. “So she's coming to help educate us. Well, I must say I should not have thought it of mamma that she would complain of us to strangers, and now this woman advises her to hurt our feelings.”

"I never trusted her," said Marjory. "And you see I was right. She tried to pretend to be our friend, but I saw through her. Now perhaps you will care more about consulting me than her."

"It is horrid, isn't it?" added Marian. "Now she will always be trying to be nasty to us, and this woman will help her."

"Father won't allow it," returned Marjory.

"Perhaps he won't be able to help it," answered Dorothy. "You see, mamma's mother must be his mother-in-law, and from all I've read mothers-in-law are very bad and rule the whole house."

"Perhaps if father knew she was his mother-in-law he wouldn't let her come," suggested Marian.

"He must know it," returned Dorothy, pulling at her long plait as she often did when in a difficulty. "But still perhaps we ought to warn him."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Marian. "Please don't, for then you'd have to tell about the letter."

Dorothy sat bolt upright. "Oh, Marjory," she said, "we ought not to have read the letter at all. What shall we do?"

"I never thought of that," said Marjory, slowly. "Of course we oughtn't to have, but now it's too late."

"I didn't know what it was till I began, and then I forgot," went on Dorothy. "It was a mean thing

to do, and I don't know whatever mamma will think of us. I shall go and tell her at once."

Marian began to cry, and begged and entreated Dorothy not to tell, and Marjory said she thought perhaps it would only make mamma uncomfortable, and do no good.

Dorothy reflected. "Of course it would upset her," she said.

"And she does seem upset already by all that happened yesterday," sobbed the chief culprit. "And she gets so excited and that keeps her awake, and father is so unhappy when she has a bad night."

"I do hate not telling," said Dorothy, "and some day she must know. Only perhaps it would be a pity to tell her to-day and upset her again, especially as it really can't do any good if she knows. She can't explain away what she did wrong, for she'd no business to complain of us to strangers. But I believe she would feel uncomfortable. Only it seems mean. Do leave off crying, Marian; you're giving way to your feelings as much as she does."

It needed but a little more persuasion from the other two to conquer Dorothy's scruples, and Marian, satisfied that she would not be exposed to her parents' anger, soon dried her eyes, and undertook to put back the letter. This, however, she was not able to do, as the case was now always locked. Marjory was gener-

ally the first to insist on outspoken honesty, but on this occasion her jealousy blinded her to what was right, and she did not see why her sister should be scolded by a person who came between her and Dorothy, and yet acted falsely towards them. Dorothy was genuinely upset, for underlying her conscious feeling of superiority over Mrs. Marshall was a very strong admiration and liking of which she herself was unconscious. Besides, she felt very guilty about the letter.

"I think," she said, after a pause, "that we ought to punish ourselves for reading mamma's letter, and the best will be that we do not remind father to take us to the pantomime."

"But that will punish the children, too," objected Marian.

"No, it won't, for if you don't remind them they won't think about it," answered Dorothy. "So be careful."

Jane came in to say Mrs. Marshall wanted Miss Dorothy and Miss Marjory, and they went to her sitting-room. When she heard how hoarse Marjory was, she quite forgot all she meant to say in her anxiety, which was not very gratefully received, for the girl didn't want to be fussed over, and was furious when Dorothy was reproached for having taken her out the night before. Fortunately Mary took her in

hand, or from mere perversity she would have neglected herself entirely, but as it was, she recovered in a few days. Evelyn also escaped easily, though she could not be brought to see that her book was bad, for she thought it delightful, and much regretted that she might not finish it. It seemed she had found it among her father's books, and at his wife's request he locked his book-cases for the present. As for Marian, she came off best. She dared not mention the word pantomime, but she looked out the illustrated papers which described the scenes, and left them where the children would see them. The result was inevitable. They clamoured to be taken, and their entreaties met with success. Dorothy, having remained silent as to the letter, could not bring forward any reason why she, Marjory, and Marian should not go, and though she resolved not to enjoy herself all her qualms of conscience vanished at sight of the brilliantly-lighted theatre.

“After all,” she reflected, “it wasn’t my fault, and if anyone deserves punishment it is mamma, who was so false to us.”

Ever since she had read that unfortunate letter Dorothy felt as if her stepmother had no right to expect obedience from her, and her belief in her own judgment was confirmed.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MARSHALL'S REVOLT.

MRS. MARSHALL was going to give her first dinner party, and it was difficult to say who was most excited. Mrs. Wright, who had not cooked for a party for years, felt that her whole reputation was at stake, and was in a dangerous mood. The girls were greatly interested in the whole proceedings, for there had been no dinner parties in the house since they could remember, and they watched all the proceedings closely.

"There," said Mrs. Marshall, coming into the schoolroom on the afternoon of the great day, which was the 23rd of January, "I think I have placed all the people comfortably."

Dorothy took up the list. "You haven't put our names," she said.

"My dear Dorothy!" exclaimed Mrs. Marshall: "surely you didn't think you were to come in to dinner?"

"We always do," answered Dorothy, "why shouldn't we to-night?"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Marshall, much dis-

tressed, "I never thought of such a thing. Don't you know that girls of your age never come to dinner parties? You must be satisfied with putting on your best dresses and sitting with me in the drawing-room when the visitors come. Then you three elder ones and—well, as she has been so good, I'll say Marian, too, can come into dessert if you very much wish it."

"Is it your real earnest wish that we are to be turned out for a lot of strange people?" interrupted Dorothy.

"But Dorothy don't you see——"

"I want to know yes or no, I don't care about your reasons," broke in the girl indignantly.

"That is hardly the way to speak to me, Dorothy, but I will answer as you wish. Yes, you are not to come in to dinner. Neither your father nor I think it desirable."

"I suppose this is the beginning of your firm and consistent conduct," put in Marjory, in a sneering voice.

Mrs. Marshall turned round sharply. "What do you mean, Marjory, by those words? Where did you hear them?"

"Oh, we know very well that your mother thinks we ought to be unkindly treated," went on Marjory, who was thoroughly roused by the stern, cold way in

which Dorothy had been addressed, and who in her anger forgot how she was betraying herself.

"Marjory, did you take my letter?" asked Mrs. Marshall, trying to keep calm, while Marian turned white and red, and wished she were anywhere but where she was.

"No, I didn't take it," answered Marjory.

"But it was found, and we read it before we knew what we were doing," said Dorothy.

"Who found it?" Mrs. Marshall eye fell on Marian. "Marian, was it you?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, for Marian was too frightened to speak. "She found it in the paper basket, and—"

"That's impossible," returned Mrs. Marshall, sharply; "it was in my writing-case, and what business you had with my writing-case I don't know—"

"Do you mean to say you don't believe me?" broke in Dorothy, standing right in front of her step-mother.

"How do I know what to believe? I missed part of my letter from the writing-case, which I thought I always locked, but of course I may have forgotten to do so, or left the keys about. You knew you had no right to read the letter, and yet you hadn't the common honesty to confess the truth to me. That doesn't look like reading it accidentally. Oh, I did

believe I could have trusted you, with all your faults."

"How dare you doubt my word?" cried Dorothy, who was now too angry to control herself. "But it is because you are not honest that you doubt others. First you pretend to us that you like us, and then you write to a perfect stranger and tell her horrid things about us. It is shameful."

"Dorothy, I will not hear you; leave the room at once, and do not let me see you again till you apologise. Are you not ashamed to set these children such an example? Your self-willed obstinacy is bad enough, and now you add deceit and——"

"You talk of deceit," interrupted Marjory. "And it is you who are deceitful. We didn't tell you to save your feelings, but of course people who don't tell the truth don't believe others."

Mrs. Marshall was trembling with excitement. "I will not stay to speak of this now," she said, in an agitated voice. "I am too grieved and too angry. To-morrow, perhaps, you will have thought better of your rudeness and your want of openness, and when you have apologised, perhaps you will see your conduct in its true light, unless your conceit has quite blinded you. Miss Daly," she went on, turning to the governess, who sat pale and aghast, "of course after what has occurred neither Marjory, Dorothy, nor

Marian can come to the drawing-room to-night, but if Evelyn and the younger ones care to come they can do so, only they must be properly dressed. I am grieved," she went on, stopping with her hand on the handle of the open door. "I never thought of anything like this happening."

Dorothy would not have minded her anger, but the charge of deceit was one that she could not forgive in a hurry. While the others talked and raged against Mrs. Marshall, for her rebuke of Dorothy was not to be endured, while Marian wept and Miss Daly, herself indignant at what she considered the unjust treatment of her pupils, did her best to soothe them, Dorothy sat perfectly silent by the window, looking out into the darkening twilight, and wishing her step-mother were not such a weak, excitable person, for had she been of strong nerve there would never have been any need for concealment.

Mrs. Marshall, determined to say nothing to her husband that evening, and as he came home very late she was able to keep her resolution. She would have given much to be able to sit down and cry, but she had to arrange her flowers, to superintend the servants, who had almost forgotten how to prepare a table for visitors, to dress herself, and receive her guests. She managed to conceal her anxieties, but it was awkward when the visitors asked if they were not

to see the children, none of whom appeared, and she felt thankful to Mr. Marshall for recounting laughingly the story of her first *At Home* day as an illustration of their shyness. After the visitors had gone, Mr. Marshall remarked to his wife :

“ My dear Alice, if you excite yourself so about all your dinner parties I shall not let you give any. You look quite knocked up.”

“ It wasn’t the party,” began Mrs. Marshall, and stopped short.

“ You’d better leave it all to Dorothy next time,” her husband continued, laughing. “ She has a fine talent for managing.”

“ It’s all Dorothy’s fault,” broke in Mrs. Marshall, and unable to contain herself any longer, she told him the whole story.

“ And the worst is,” she went on, when she had finished her account, “ that I really am beginning to put myself under her, and to think what she will say about what I am doing. It’s bad for me, and bad for them, and I don’t know what to do.”

Mr. Marshall was very angry, and declared he would see to matters—things should not go on like this. It was late before they fell asleep, and the next morning he insisted on his wife’s staying in bed. The girls were just leaving the breakfast room when he came down.

"Dorothy," he began, sternly, "how dare you treat your mother like this, how dare you interfere in everything and deceive her?"

"It's she who's deceitful, if she told you that," cried Marjory.

"I wasn't speaking to you, Marjory, though you are bad enough. Dorothy is most to blame, as the eldest, and if she deceives her mother, what can one expect of the younger ones? It is disgraceful. What have you to say?"

"Nothing," replied Dorothy scornfully. "You've heard her story, and of course you prefer to believe her rather than me, whom you have known so much longer."

"Of course I believe your mother; it's not likely I shall believe a girl who is so deceitful."

"Then it's no use my speaking," returned Dorothy. "I've done my best to make things pleasant, but it's no use with such a weak character, and what it will be when there's a mother-in-law in the house as well as a stepmother, I don't know. I only wish we could leave it."

"You shall have your wish," said Mr. Marshall, who was thoroughly roused. "I'll see to that. Now be off to the schoolroom, and don't let me see any of you again till you've all apologised most humbly to your mother."

It was an exceedingly uncomfortable day for everybody, and Dorothy was very miserable, because, angry as she was with her parents, she knew very well that she ought to bear some of the blame herself. Marjory refused to see things in this light, and Marian sat in floods of tears. Evelyn was annoyed because she hated to be put out, and the younger ones went about feeling very crushed and subdued, as if they too were in disgrace.

Mrs. Marshall got up after tea feeling thoroughly rested and able to see matters from a more cheerful point of view. She thought she had been too harsh, that she ought to have listened to the children more quietly, and not cast doubt on their story. She wished she had not told her husband, but consoled herself with the reflection that he would forget all about it or else be ready to laugh at them all when he came in. She would have sent for Dorothy had she not promised not to see any of the girls till his return, so when she heard him come in she went down to meet him. He was looking very grave, and after asking her how she did, said he was going to the schoolroom to tell the girls his decision.

"Your decision?" cried Mrs. Marshall, astonished. "What do you mean, Frank? I hope you were not harsh to the children, for I begin to see I was too hasty."

"That convinces me I have done right," returned her husband, and he would say no more till they were in the schoolroom. The girls looked up sullenly from their various occupations, but said nothing.

"Now, girls," said Mr. Marshall, "after what happened yesterday and this morning I am not going to waste any more time in scolding. I agree with Dorothy that the house is too small for all of us, and I have therefore arranged for the four eldest to go to a school at Bath. To-day is Wednesday, and you are expected on Friday, so you will have to-morrow for preparations."

It would be difficult to say who was most horrified at this announcement. Mrs. Marshall was the first to speak.

"Surely, Frank, you are joking."

"Am I likely to joke in this matter? Do you think I shall stand calmly by while you are worried into an illness by these girls? Everybody thinks school is best for them, and there they will learn to know that they are not the most important people in the world. As I said, everything is settled, and on Friday they go. It is too late to change now. I arranged everything before I came home, because I knew in your good nature you would plead for them."

"But what school is it? surely we must make in-

quiries first, for supposing they did go, they must be comfortable. You can't send them off like this."

"The school's all right. I asked Hartley if he knew of one, for I knew he'd got a niece he was responsible for, and he said there was an excellent one in Bath, where she was. He'd had no end of trouble with her at home, but they seemed to manage her capitally there, her letters home were quite happy, and he thought she'd decidedly improved. It's kept by a Miss Barker, a most intelligent woman, Hartley says. I telegraphed to ask if she had any vacancies, she wired back yes, and added that term had begun, so I telegraphed that she was to expect the girls on Friday, and it's no use saying any more. It'll be good for their characters and good for their learning, for I know they're too great a strain for Miss Daly."

"You are quite mistaken, quite mistaken, Mr. Marshall," cried Miss Daly, roused for once from her timidity, and she rose from her chair, to which she had sat rooted since the fatal announcement was made, regardless of the fact that her dainty white knitting had fallen into the fender. "It will be most harmful for their characters. I know all their faults, but a stranger might spoil them for want of understanding them, and as for the strain, why, it's no fatigue at all to teach them."

"My mind is made up," answered Mr. Marshall.

"No arguments can move me. I ought to have seen before that this was the only thing to do. I hope," he went on, looking at his daughters, "that by your conduct during the time you remain here, and during your stay at school you will show that you are really ashamed of your behaviour to your kind mother."

"Don't, Frank, don't!" cried Mrs. Marshall. "Oh, my poor girls, it's all my fault!"

"Do you really mean, father, that you are going to turn us out without listening to us?" asked Dorothy, who could scarcely believe her ears.

"I realise now what your conduct has been all along," replied her father. "I am not going to fall under your influence."

"If you must do this cruel thing," said Dorothy, trying to speak more quietly and steadily, "at least send only Marjory and me. I know it will be bad for Evelyn and Marian."

"Your day for advising is past," returned her father. "I can judge of this matter in a way that you cannot, and the sooner you learn to understand that you are only a conceited, ignorant little girl, the better it will be for everybody. All that you have to do is to apologise to your mother and pack your clothes. Come, Alice," and he left the room, afraid of hearing further reproaches.

"My poor children," said Mrs. Marshall, "don't

despair. I feel that I am more to blame than you, for I did not listen to you, nor in my first anger did I give your father an unprejudiced account. Tell me how it all happened, and then I will do my best for you."

Dorothy was too downcast to be sullen, so she gave her mother an honest account of how they had come to read the letter, and Marian confessed that she had taken it from the writing-case.

Mrs. Marshall was so full of sympathy, because of the pain the letter must have caused them, that Marian's fault was almost forgotten. She quite entered into their difficulty about confessing, and at last she left them, to speak to their father. But her hopes were dashed, for Mr. Marshall was not to be moved. Too indolent as a rule to take trouble, he now and then had fits of firmness and energy, when nothing could stir him from his determination. He had made up his mind that the girls should go, and go they must. The only concession he could be induced to make was that they need not go till Monday.

The whole household was miserable and depressed. Miss Daly sat and wept over her hapless pupils, the younger children did all they could for the victims, the servants ran about for them, and Mrs. Wright spent her sorrow in cooking all their favourite dishes. Mary and Mrs. Marshall were obliged to put aside their grief and work, for there were various things to

be bought and old clothes to be done up and mended. Mr. Marshall spent very little time at home, because he could not endure the reproachful, mournful faces that met him there, and he was glad when Monday came, for there were times when his heart began to soften and his resolution to give way. He declared that he could not possibly take them to Bath, he would see them off by a train that would arrive there about half-past four, and Miss Barker would meet them. There was no changing, and he would tip the guard, so that no harm could come to them, and though he was obliged to consent to Mrs. Marshall's going to the station he refused to allow Miss Daly and the younger ones to come, because he didn't "want to be surrounded by a weeping mob."

They had an omnibus to take them to Paddington, and on the way Mrs. Marshall made one more effort to move him, but in vain, for now he was afraid of making himself ridiculous by yielding. When they were in the train, he produced half a sovereign for each girl, and a big box of chocolates, told them to be good girls, and went off to speak to the guard. Mrs. Marshall sat in the carriage with them. "Children," she said, "there's just one thing I must say. If you are unhappy or uncomfortable in your school, write to me and I'll come and take you away at once."

Dorothy looked up at her. "I do think you've

tried to be kind to us," she said. " You've made mistakes, but now you know it, I believe we should have got on better."

" Come, Alice, you must get out," cried Mr. Marshall, and in another five minutes the train moved out of the station, and Mr. and Mrs. Marshall returned to the house, which seemed curiously silent without the girls, for the younger ones were very melancholy at their sisters' departure and very much afraid of bringing a similar fate upon themselves by any misconduct. As for Miss Daly, she had already resigned her post, and though of course nobody dreamt of her going, she went about like a martyr, feeling as if her days among her only friends were numbered. Gradually, however, matters returned to their normal condition, and everybody became more cheerful. Mrs. Marshall was astonished to find how she missed the girls, and discovered for the first time what Dorothy had been to her. She thought perhaps it might be better for the girl to be more with companions of her own age, but she longed for her to be back, and she wrote long and affectionate letters to the sisters every week.

CHAPTER X.

ALBION HOUSE.

IT was not till they were alone in the train that the girls actually realised that they were going among strangers, for till now they had been too much occupied with trying to escape their fate to think what it involved. A great terror seized them, and they felt as if a railway accident would be a welcome event. Marjory was the only one who enjoyed any consolation ; she could not but feel delighted at the idea of having Dorothy all to herself again, but as they drew near Bath, she would have given up even this joy if she could only have been safe at home again. Miss Barker was waiting for them at the station ; she was tall and thin, with nothing very winning in face or manner. She was originally a daily governess, but when an aunt died and left her a small legacy, she started a school, and managed to obtain a certain reputation for her establishment as one where girls received a sound education without the introduction of new-fangled ideas, and up till now she had always found a sufficient number of parents who objected to modern education for their daughters, and were glad

to entrust them to her. It was a very comfortable theory for her, for she was cramped by want of capital and of knowledge, and was thus able to manage with what would otherwise have been a very insufficient staff. She was not particularly fond of teaching or of girls, but she did her best for those under her charge, and if she failed to make them happy, it was owing to want of sympathy rather than intentional unkindness. The unexpected advent of four new pupils was a source of great delight to her, and she did her best to be gracious in her welcome. She was not troubled by the irresponsiveness with which her kind words were received, for she knew that the girls were bound to feel miserable at first, and Mr. Marshall had mentioned in his letter how very reserved and shy his daughters were with strangers. She asked them various questions about home, and rejoiced inwardly when she heard that there were three younger girls. Dorothy just answered her questions, and no more. In the train she had made her sisters promise never to betray the fact that they had a stepmother. "For," said she, "strangers need not know that discord has broken out in our family, and we shall not need to reproach ourselves with the thought that others will blame mamma for driving us from home." Mr. Marshall had not mentioned the matter either, and there

was nothing in Miss Barker's questions to elicit the family disgrace.

The fly stopped before a high, dull house in a dreary-looking street. The windows had glazed glass in the lower panes to hide the view inside and outside, thus increasing the gloominess of the rooms, which in no case would have been cheerful. The hall was dark and narrow. On the right was one fairly large schoolroom furnished with desks, and one smaller one where the boarders worked in the evening seated round a table. On the left was a room in which the girls had their music lessons and occasionally practised, and where Miss Barker sat of an evening. The furniture was old and heavy-looking ; the music-room alone boasted a worn and faded carpet. Ink stains were visible on walls and desks, and even on the ceilings, some maps hung in the schoolrooms, and in the music-room were a few photographic groups of old girls, in narrow black frames. There were no curtains, no plants, no nick-knacks of any sort, and to girls who came from a bright and cheerful home the whole place seemed insufferably dull.

"Welcome to Albion House," said Miss Barker, as they entered the dimly-lighted hall, "and may you soon come to regard it as a second home. What are you doing there, Rose?" she added sharply, as a giggle was heard from the music-room.

"I was putting my music ready for to-morrow, Miss Barker," was the answer, and a tall girl with short brown hair and a sharp, bright face came out.

"You have no business to be in there now. Go to the schoolroom at once. Or stay, though; your uncle, I understand, is a friend of Mr. Marshall, therefore it will be well for you to become acquainted at once with the Misses Marshall. Lead your new schoolfellows to their room to take off their things and do the best you can to make them feel at home."

"Certainly, Miss Barker," replied Rose, and she led the way upstairs to a bare-looking bedroom in which their boxes had already been placed. Rose carefully closed the door behind them, and turned to examine her forlorn-looking companions.

"You poor things, you look frozen inside and out," she cried. "Is it true that my uncle recommended your people to send you here?"

"Yes," murmured Dorothy.

"He meant well, I expect, but he's got very little sense for a clever man," remarked the girl, calmly sitting down on the nearest bed and swinging her legs. "First he sent me because he didn't know what to do with me, and Miss Barker met him somewhere and meanly recommended herself, and now, instead of taking my word for it that it's a hateful establishment, he gets you sent."

"Is it so horrid?" asked Dorothy, in alarm.

"All schools are horrid, but this one is especially so," returned Rose cheerfully. "However, I daresay you'll learn to bear it. For goodness sake don't look so miserable, and take off your jackets. That's her notion of making people feel at home, and she'll row you if you don't."

They took off their hats and jackets, while Rose watched them in silence. Hearing a step outside she jumped up, hid the box of chocolates, Mr. Marshall's parting gift, which Dorothy had laid on the dressing-table, under the counterpane "for safety," as she said in a hurried whisper, and made a great show of helping the girls when Miss Barker came in.

"That's right," said the latter, "you will soon feel happy and comfortable. Your boxes shall be unpacked for you, so that you start with your drawers and cupboards quite tidy. I hope you will keep them so. Over the mantelpiece you will find suspended a list of rules which you must study, and of which the most important are that you do not enter the rooms of the other girls without permission, and that you do not speak in the bedrooms. There is the tea-bell, so we will go down, and I will introduce you to the rest of the household."

Rose kept Dorothy back as the others left the room under pretence of tying her hair ribbon. "Don't worry about the rules," she whispered. "We none of

us keep more of them than we can help." The dining-room was on the ground floor, and was reached by means of dark, crooked stairs, which strangers found very awkward. Two teachers and the remaining boarders were already seated round the tea table. Miss Smith, the second mistress, was a short, stout, elderly person much given to nagging and very much disliked by her pupils, while Miss Porter, the assistant teacher, who was still at the beginning of her career, was fast having her enthusiasm knocked out of her by the snubbing of her employer, who saw no necessity for innovations, and by the carelessness and thoughtlessness of her pupils, who didn't see the necessity for work and did not consider that a teacher is also a human being. In addition to these two resident teachers Miss Barker employed a French teacher, Madam Brun, of whom she was almost as frightened as the girls were, and who was the only teacher who really got any work out of the pupils; and a music teacher for the advanced pupils, the beginners being taken by Miss Porter.

Miss Barker showed the girls their places. Dorothy had Rose on one side and Marjory on the other, the younger ones were placed opposite. When they were all seated Miss Barker introduced them, and then proceeded to pour out the tea. The new comers did not know where to look when they found that

everybody was staring at them. Blushing, embarrassed, and miserable, they sat with their eyes fixed on their plates, scarcely even daring to think.

"You must make a good tea after your journey," said Miss Barker. "And by the bye, girls, you may talk at tea this evening, and in order that you may all become well acquainted I will excuse any preparation that remains to be done for to-morrow. Rose, help Dorothy to the bread and jam."

"What a comfort that I haven't begun my lessons," whispered Rose, as she handed the plate to Dorothy, "now the virtuous will be punished. Oh, I say, you must take some. It's not often we get such a feast as this. The jam and cake are in your honour, it's generally bread and scrape."

"I'm not hungry," answered poor Dorothy, getting redder and redder beneath the gaze of the others.

"Well, then, just take it, and I'll eat it for you," said Rose, "and we'll do the same with the cake. You see, we're allowanceed in a way," she went on. "You, who come from a well-fed home, have yet to learn what hunger means."

For the next ten minutes there was comparative silence, as everybody was busy eating. Though they usually detested any demonstrativeness, Dorothy and Marjory, in their utter misery, now edged closer to

each other on the form, and sat with their hands clasped under the table. When Rose had finished her share of cake, and was beginning on Dorothy's, she again became communicative.

"Now I'll tell you about the girls," she said. "What's your sister's name, Marjory? Well, the girl next Marjory is Lucy Newton, wretched little humbug, I call her. Next her comes Mary Wilson, goes in for being sensible and that sort of thing. That girl who looks like a dying duck in a thunderstorm is Alice Phillips; she writes poetry, that's what makes her like that. Her father's something or other on the papers, writes the advertisements or something, so she suffers from hereditary genius, poor thing. Those roly-poly girls are the Rowtons, Daisy and Bessie—rather convenient to have in front of you when you fall down the kitchen stairs. Doris Phillips isn't bad if you don't ruffle her. That smirky thing is Ada Bright, conceited minx and sneak. Next comes Nelly Seymour, good-natured little thing; can be made very useful if well plied with sweets. The others are little imps, and don't matter. The day boarders are not up to much, but you mustn't quarrel with them, because they smuggle in sweets and tarts."

"They all seem horrid," whispered Dorothy, dismayed.

"Except me. I think really I'm the best of the

lot," returned Rose. "But," she went on frankly, "of course this is only my opinion, and perhaps I'm prejudiced."

After tea the girls went to the small schoolroom to play and romp. As the four sisters refused to join, they were at first left to themselves, and even Miss Porter, who was in charge, soon gave up her well-meant efforts at consolation and returned to a corner to correct a pile of books. Presently the elder girls gathered round the Marshalls to cross-examine them, but they were not very successful, and therefore began to give information themselves as to the school arrangements.

"At seven the bell rings, and you get up," began Rose.

"It's a good thing you say 'you,' and not 'I,'" interrupted Daisy.

"Of course, dear, I shouldn't say it of you," replied Rose, sweetly, "for everybody knows you're always late." Daisy sat and reflected, while the others laughed, and Rose went on:

"You wash in cold water, because it's invigorating, dress, and hurry down to prayers and breakfast."

"No, you don't," put in Nelly Seymour. "You're dressed at 7.30, then you practise or study till 8."

"Little girls shouldn't interfere," said Rose, pulling her hair.

"I'm not littler than her," cried Nelly, pointing to Marian.

"Nelly, you will shock these young ladies with your grammar," exclaimed Rose reprovingly.

"Shut up, Rose, you're not nearly as funny as you think," retorted Nelly, edging off to a safe distance.

"I said 'I' with inverted commas; I didn't mean me," broke in Daisy.

"The child's mad," said Lucy, astonished.

"Not a bit of it. She's only gone back to the beginning," explained Rose: "she means about the getting up. But to continue, after a simple breakfast of bread and scrape and something hot which goes by the name of tea or coffee as the whim takes our esteemed principal, but it is popularly supposed to be made of muddy water, a tea leaf, or a coffee bean, we practise and work, or pretend to, till nine, when the day girls come, and at 9.15 we go to lessons, which are dull, of course."

"Because you take no pains," said Mary Wilson.

"The composition is most interesting," added Alice Phillips.

"Yes," retorted Rose, "but not when you don't go in for the hereditary genius business."

"Then there are music lessons," said Doris, "and then there's a walk, or play if it's bad weather. And then dinner at 1.30——"

"Fat meat and skimpy puddings," put in the irrepressible Rose.

"I'm sure it's very good," said Lucy.

"Miss Barker's not outside the door," said Rose, "so why tell a fib?"

"Recreation till three," said Daisy, in a great hurry to get in a word, "lessons of preparation till 4.30, recreation, tea, work till seven in the winter."

"Six-thirty for the little ones," cried Nelly.

"At 7.30 three thin biscuits, of which hundreds go to the pound, and pump-water adulterated with milk, and at 8 bed," finished up Rose.

"Saturday's half-holiday and play, Sunday's church and catechism, and write letters home, that Miss Barker reads, so don't make remarks about her in them; and a dull walk or read goody-goody books if it's bad weather, and jam or cake for tea, but not both, and tart for dinner, and I've just as good a right to talk as you big girls," said little Bessie Rowton, all in one breath, for fear she should be stopped.

"Well done, Bessie," said Rose. "You almost beat Madame at a speech."

"Get off the table, Rose," cried Miss Porter from her corner.

"I thought we might do as we liked to-night, Miss Porter," answered Rose, without stirring, and with just that shade of insolence in her tone which annoys

the person spoken to though it admits of no reproof, so that Miss Porter went on with her corrections, and took no further notice of Rose's misdeeds.

"Hasn't Evelyn got lovely hair?" cried Nelly, who had been leaning against Rose and staring at the new girls.

"Yes," said Doris, "it is such a pretty colour, and such lots of it. It puts yours in the shade, Ada."

The others laughed, for Ada's hair was one of her weak points. She had very little, but she was very vain of her appearance, and was wont to declare that its fineness and its uncommon colour more than made up for its shortness.

"I think Evelyn's beautiful to look at," murmured Bessie from the background. Evelyn began to think she would perhaps get on with the girls, while Dorothy was divided between joy that others thought Evelyn pretty, and anxiety for her sister's character. Fortunately she was still too shy to express her thoughts, for the girls would have attributed her anxious remonstrances to jealousy.

"Here comes Miss Barker," cried Rose, slipping from the table so suddenly that Nelly tumbled over, but she had to postpone her revenge, for the door opened and Miss Barker and Miss Smith came in for prayers, and soon after Miss Barker took her new pupils to their room. She showed them where their

things had been put, and again drew their attention to the rules.

"I hope," she went on, "you will quickly settle down and find friends among your new companions. I would specially advise you to seek out Lucy Newton, Alice Phillips, and Mary Wilson as your intimate acquaintance. The last-named is the steadiest worker in the school, and the two first are very good girls; I am sure your parents will like you to associate with them, for Lucy's father is a well-known merchant who has done a great deal for the town, and Alice's father is a journalist and author, a very clever man. Of course, if your father knows Mr. Hartley I cannot object to your acquaintance with Rose, but I must express a wish that you do not allow her to influence your conduct, as her own is in nowise satisfactory. Now go to bed quietly and put out your candle carefully. Miss Porter will come to see that it is out. Good-night." She impressed a kiss on each forehead and went away.

The girls began to undress, not daring to speak. Marian flung herself into Dorothy's arms and began to sob, and Evelyn stood with tears rolling down her cheeks, while the two eldest girls contained themselves with difficulty. They had not been in bed long before Miss Porter came to see that the light was out. A few minutes later the door opened again.

"Are you asleep?" whispered Rose.

"No," answered Dorothy.

"I only stepped in to remind you not to leave your sweets under the counterpane," said Rose, coming nearer. "I had to wait till Miss Porter had gone down."

"You can have them," returned Dorothy, pulling out the box and putting it into Rose's hand.

"H'm. Easy to see you're new," said Rose. "It seems rather mean to take them when you'll long for them in the future, but I'll stand treat next time I've any money; all mine has gone in fines. Did Miss B. warn you against me?"

"She said we weren't to be very friendly with you but with Lucy and Alice," replied Dorothy, hesitatingly.

"I thought so. She can't bear me. Lucy's a fearful humbug, and her father's going to be mayor some day, and as I told you, Alice's father writes the advertisements. I really must find out a use for my uncle," went on Rose, whose dislike of her principal always increased her natural love of exaggeration. "Pooh, it's cold in one's night-gown, so I'll be off. Good-night."

It was late before the two eldest girls went to sleep. They clung closely to each other, for they shared a bed, and cried silently long after Marian and Evelyn had become oblivious of their troubles.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW EXPERIENCES.

ONLY those who have gone unwillingly amongst strangers for the first time can know the feeling of dreariness and depression with which the Marshalls woke up next morning at the sound of the bell. Of course they jumped up at once, being new comers, and unpractised in the art of lying in bed till the last possible moment. It was cold, and dressing was a difficult matter, but when they came into the school-room there was no one there yet.

“ I suppose we may talk here,” whispered Dorothy, as they stood round the miserable fire trying to warm their hands.

“ There’s nothing about it in the rules,” answered Marjory.

“ Oh, Dorothy,” cried Marian, “ how shall we ever remember those rules, and isn’t everything horrid ? ”

“ We must bear it,” sighed Dorothy.

“ And mamma said if we didn’t like it we could come home,” said Marian.

“ If they read our letters we can’t tell them at home,” answered Marjory.

"We ought to try and make the best of it as long as we can," remarked Dorothy. "Perhaps things may improve."

"I think the girls horrid," moaned Marian.

"I thought some of them rather nice," said Evelyn thoughtfully.

"Evelyn, you mustn't believe what they say about your hair and looks," said Dorothy, in alarm for her sister's character, but she could say no more, for two of the little ones came in, and gradually the others struggled in, yawning, shivering, and disposed to be quarrelsome. Rose arrived breathless, fastening her dress as she came in; she was followed by the teachers and Miss Barker.

Miss Barker said "Good-morning," and the pupils kissed her and the other teachers. Then she held out her hand to Dorothy, and asked how she had slept. The girl touched the proffered hand and answered, "Quite well, thank you."

"Of course you do not know all our habits," remarked Miss Barker, "but I must tell you, that I consider it more respectful for a girl to kiss her teachers, and thus to express what she feels towards them."

"But we don't like kissing, especially strangers," cried Dorothy, in dismay.

The girls giggled, and Miss Barker frowned.



"BUT WE DON'T LIKE KISSING, ESPECIALLY STRANGERS,"
CRIED DOROTHY.

"Unquestioning obedience is your first duty," she said coldly, and poor Dorothy was obliged to kiss her, and the morning and evening salute always remained a great trial to her and to Marjory, even though Rose taught them to soften its horrors by putting their face close to Miss Barker's and kissing the air. They now took their places for prayers, and these were just over when Daisy slipped into the room. Her companions grinned while Miss Barker reproved her and gave her some texts to learn by way of punishment. Then three of the girls went to practise, the others looked over their lessons, and the Marshalls were set some dates to learn. After breakfast they went to the schoolroom, where there was more talking than work till school began, and then Miss Barker took them away to examine them. She found them very ignorant, but as she had not many big girls in her school she decided that Dorothy and Marjory should go in the first class, and Evelyn and Marian in the second. Then she asked about their music.

"We are thoroughly unmusical, and detest music," said Dorothy, in her decided way.

"You must learn to express your opinion in a less pronounced manner," returned Miss Barker. "I presume you have not learnt much?"

"Years ago," answered Dorothy, "and father said he'd just as lief we gave it up."

"I will consult him in the matter," said Miss Barker, and if the girls escaped this, to them additional torture, it was only because with his accustomed dilatoriness Mr. Marshall forgot to answer the letter in time. "I sent your father a telegram to announce your safe arrival," went on Miss Barker, "and to-morrow you may write home, though Sunday is the usual day for letters. As your spelling and composition seem faulty, I will look through what you write and assist you, so that your letters may not be a disgrace to the school. Now go to your class."

The lessons were a new source of discomfort to the shy, homesick girls. They knew so little, and in their ignorance thought the others knew so much; they found it most embarrassing to answer with all the others listening, while they shrank from the meaning looks and giggles which followed on their replies. The French was the worst, for Madame had terrible powers of sarcasm at her command. The laziness and ignorance of her pupils maddened her, and she was not comforted by having "four new ignoramuses with an accent that would make the very dogs of Paris howl," as she expressed it. She never gave a lesson without someone leaving the room in tears; the girls one and all hated and feared her, and it was not till long afterwards that they were able to realise what a

splendid teacher she was and what an excellent grounding she had given them. Miss Daly's French was of the feeblest description, and her former pupils could neither read nor translate correctly, and but for the assistance of the other girls they would have fared badly.

At tea-time Miss Barker handed Dorothy a letter.

"It's been opened," exclaimed the girl in astonishment, after she had looked at the envelope.

"I thought I explained to you that I opened all letters that come to the house," returned Miss Barker, a little stiffly.

"But this is from mamma, and she may write to me about private things," said Dorothy.

"It is my invariable rule," replied Miss Barker, "and all must submit to it alike. I examine the letters you receive, and all letters written by you must be brought to me for inspection. Remember that, please."

Rose pulled Dorothy's dress and whispered to her to "shut up and sit down," and the girl obeyed her, though she was very angry and indignant. After tea they read the letter, which contained just a few affectionate lines from Mrs Marshall, in which she hoped they would feel happy and comfortable. They were to be sure and let her know if they were unhappy or if they did not feel well.

"What's the good of that?" said Marjory. "We can't tell her anything we really think."

"You can in one way," whispered Ada, who overheard her.

"How?"

"Give one of the day girls a letter to post. It's strictly forbidden, but it can be done all the same."

"That would be dishonest," said Dorothy indignant.

Ada shrugged her shoulders. "You won't get on here if you have that kind of idea," she answered. "If you go in for keeping the rules you won't have much of a time. Miss Barker's always suspecting wrong, whether you do it or not, so you may just as well do it."

As time went on the girls found most of their companions shared Ada's opinion. The tone in the school was not very good, partly owing to Miss Barker's incessant distrust of the girls, and partly because there were one or two girls there who had no very high standard of truthfulness. Even Rose, who was naturally an honest girl, would resort to artifices and excuses that shocked the elder Marshalls. She saw that Dorothy, towards whom she was attracted, shrank from her in consequence, and she therefore entered on an explanation one evening when Miss Barker and Miss Smith were out. They were all

supposed to be in bed, and Miss Porter had gone to her room after paying her nightly visit of inspection. Doris and Rose crept into the Marshalls' room in their nightgowns, Rose got in bed with Marjory and Dorothy, while Doris joined the younger ones. They were provided with two large bags of sweets.

"We owed you some for those lovely chocolates," explained Rose, "so set to work and don't be shy."

"How did you get them?" asked Marian, for the boarders were forbidden to buy sweets.

"Amy Miller brought them in," answered Rose. "Help yourself, Dorothy."

Dorothy hesitated to take a sweet. "It's all wrong," she said. "Your being here, the talking, and the sweets, and everything."

"Yes," answered Rose cheerfully, "it's all wrong; but do put your conscience away for once, and be sensible."

"Eating sweets in bedrooms is breaking rules, but it isn't wrong," cried Doris. "They do it at every school I ever heard of."

"If rules weren't meant to be broken," said Rose, "I'd like to know what they were made for. It's half the fun of life, and so you'll find when you've been here longer. But I know there's a lot goes on here that really is bad. It made me uncomfortable at first; but it's no good worrying about it, for one

can't alter it. I'd rather tell the truth any day, but when people don't believe the truth it's their own fault if you tell them lies."

"Call it prevaricate," suggested Doris; "it doesn't sound so bad."

"No," answered Rose. "When you call an excuse a lie it's much harder to soothe your conscience than when you call it a fib."

"It seems horridly mean," sighed Dorothy; "I think I'd rather bear the scolding."

"I think it's dreadful to be scolded before everyone," said Marian. "I should hate it."

"Don't excite yourself, my dear, you can't escape it," answered Doris; "we all have to endure it."

"I don't mind it one bit," laughed Rose. "You have to care for people before you mind being scolded before them, and I don't care for a soul here."

"Not for me?" cried Doris, rather aggrieved.

"Not as much as you do for me, and that's not much," returned Rose frankly. "We only chummed up because we couldn't bear the others. I think I could care for Dorothy if she'd let me."

"Really?" asked Dorothy, rather pleased.

"Yes, really; only you all stick together so, and don't let a soul come near you. Suppose you let Marjory walk with Doris to-morrow, and you walk with me."

"If Marjory wouldn't mind," answered Dorothy, and Marjory agreed, though she felt hurt that Dorothy should wish it.

"Why do you stay if you don't like it?" asked Evelyn.

"It's not so easy to get away as you seem to think," returned Doris.

"Mamma says we needn't stay if we don't like it," said Marian.

"Yes; but when you begin to say you don't like it your people always find excuses, and say it's because you don't understand, and the rules are all for your good," replied Doris discontentedly. "I know, for I've tried it."

"It's no use arguing with my uncle," said Rose placidly. "And I must say I did try the dear old fellow's temper. I used to live with an aunt, and suddenly she married—goodness knows why; *she* was old, but *he* was aged. However, they thought I should disturb the domestic bliss, and packed me off to a pious aunt. She said my influence was not good for the children, because I taught them to be noisy, and sent me to Uncle Joe. He is a regular old bachelor, and I tried to stir him up and bring a little life into the house; but he said it was bad for his nerves, and now I only go there for the holidays. So, you see," she went on a little wistfully, "I've been

knocked about and wanted by nobody, and I've not had much chance of being good."

"No, indeed," began Dorothy warmly. But Doris cut her short by exclaiming that she heard the front door, and she and Rose scuttled off to their rooms as quickly as they could.

"Rose is rather a nice girl," said Dorothy.

"Yes," answered Marjory, glad that the darkness prevented Dorothy's noticing the jealous tears that had come to her eyes.

"Her sweets were good," said Marian. "I shall ask Amy to bring me some."

"Marian, you mustn't," protested Dorothy. "It's wrong."

"Not worse than letting those girls come here and keep us all awake," answered Marian rebelliously. "I'm going to sleep. Good-night."

The girls gradually began to settle down a little — that is, they learnt to talk with the others and occasionally to join in their games; they managed to answer in class at times, and to lose a little of their outward shyness; but they hated the place, the rules, the lessons, and they did not like their teachers. The lessons they found very difficult, for they had not learnt to concentrate their attention, and everything was so new and strange. Dorothy began to like Rose, and would seek her help and advice. Evelyn

became friendly with Lucy, whose pretty purring ways pleased her, and who enjoyed a very large acquaintance with various novels of an exciting description. Marian and Ada Bright became intimate, and did much of their work together. Dorothy was not pleased that Evelyn and Marian had chosen these friends, for she did not like them, and Rose told her they were not to be trusted; but her sisters would not listen to her remonstrances. She had Rose, and sisters couldn't stick together at school, they said.

Evelyn, perhaps, received less actual harm than Marian, for Lucy's character was silly rather than bad; but Ada was not a nice girl. She had an underhand disposition, and was a special adept at the dishonest tricks which were practised in the second class under indolent Miss Smith's very eye. Marian was disgusted at first, but her old anxiety to stand well with everyone led her to yield, partly to avoid Miss Smith's scoldings, partly to prevent the girls thinking her disagreeable. Dorothy did not know all that went on, but she had an uneasy feeling that her sister was changed, and she also felt anxious about her health. Marian was not very strong; she disliked the school diet, which though good of its kind, was not attractive to growing girls; she ate very little, therefore, and then satisfied her hunger with cakes and sweets.

smuggled in by the day-boarders. Marjory was perhaps the most unhappy of the four, for Dorothy's liking for Rose made her miserable, and she moped by herself when the two were together, refusing the proffered friendship of Doris and Mary. The teachers did not particularly take to the Marshalls, for their shyness was annoying, and their ignorance entailed a certain amount of extra work on them. Dorothy, too, soon acquired a reputation for insubordination, because she was so outspoken with regard to what she disapproved of, when she was not kept back by shyness. When on the first Sunday morning she and her sisters had to go upstairs and unplait their hair for church, to the joy of the girls she actually remonstrated with Miss Barker. She had to obey, and after that the others never missed a chance of encouraging Marian and Evelyn to undo their plaits in playtime.

Of course, as their letters were inspected they were obliged to confine themselves to a meagre statement of facts when they wrote home; but Mrs. Marshall attributed this to their want of skill in letter-writing, and never guessed how miserable and homesick were the girls to whom she weekly wrote long and affectionate letters.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONCERT.

"I KNOW something," said Ada, coming into the schoolroom one day during the after-dinner recreation.

"What?" cried the others, who were feeling rather dull. And they crowded round her.

"Miss Young is giving a concert next Friday evening."

"Hurrah!" cried Daisy. "Then we shall all go."

The others were equally delighted.

"I shan't go," said Dorothy; "I hate music."

"Not go!" cried Doris. "Why, it's the one break in the term, and you needn't listen to the music."

"It's something to see people nicely dressed and the hall lighted up," said Nelly joyfully.

"Oh, how can you hate music?" said Alice. "I love it."

"It gives pretty little ideas for pretty little poems, and arouses the hereditary genius," put in Rose, who always insisted that Alice wrote poetry, and had a

great contempt for her efforts, though she had never seen them. "This was her last:—

'Like a beautiful star,
The piano and the guitar
Are jingling.
As the sound I hear,
I feel that each ear
Is tingling.'"

"Rubbish!" cried Alice indignantly.

"But to turn from the poet," went on Rose, "you won't have a chance of staying at home. It's in the contract that Miss Barker takes tickets for all the girls."

"Gets the lessons cheaper in consequence," said Doris.

"Doris, you've a common mind," remonstrated Rose. "One may think those things, but one doesn't say them before the very young."

Doris tossed her head. "I don't know who made you a judge of what was to be said," she cried angrily.

"Look out, girls, Doris has got her temper up," said Nelly joyfully, for she delighted in seeing Doris angry; but the latter controlled herself by a great effort and Evelyn turned attention to herself by asking if they would have to wear their best clothes.

"Of course," said Rose. "We have to look a credit to the establishment."

"Evelyn will be sweet," said Lucy, "in her white dress with her hair floating about her."

Dorothy looked angry. "Why do you always tell her so?" she asked. "There's no need to make her vain."

"It won't hurt her, Dolly," replied Lucy, who had discovered Dorothy's aversion to shortened names, and loved to plague her accordingly, and she led Evelyn away with audible remarks about red-haired people and jealousy, that Evelyn resented privately, though she loved her friend's flattery.

"We shall have to club together for cakes and sweets for when we come home," said Ada to Marian.

"I wish I slept with you," sighed Marian. "Dorothy won't let us have any fun."

"I can't think how you can let her interfere like that," exclaimed Ada. "My elder sister can't order me about like that, and she's left school and goes to parties. She tried it on, but I soon showed her I wasn't going to be her slave."

"Dorothy is rather cool," returned Marian, who as usual was influenced by the person she was with, and whose loyalty to her sister, Ada was doing her best to undermine.

"Look here," whispered Ada, "I'll tell you what. You wait till you think she's asleep and then slip into my room. Others do it and don't get caught. Why, I do it myself."

"Oh, do," begged Bessie, who had come up unperceived, and who slept in the same room as Ada. "It would be such fun."

"I'll do my best," answered Marian. "I should dearly love it. Only I've spent most of my money in cakes, and the rest has gone in fines."

"Mean, those fines are," said Bessie, who, like all the girls, would infinitely have preferred a bad mark to paying a fine for spilling the ink, leaving books about, slamming doors and other infringements of rules.

"Can't you borrow from Evelyn?" suggested Ada.

"I don't believe she has got much left," answered Marian, "though I don't know what she's done with it."

"Try Mary Wilson," said Ada.

"But what shall I say? I can't tell her what I want it for?"

"You could tell her you'd lost your reader and had no money to buy a new one, and were afraid of getting into trouble," answered Ada.

"But that wouldn't be true," said Marian, much shocked.

"Oh, bother. You could make it true. Look here: leave it to me, and I'll manage."

In this she succeeded, but she would not tell Marian what she had said, when later in the day Mary came to her with two shillings, told her she was sorry she was in trouble and hoped she would be a good girl and do better another time. Mary was as good-natured as she was conscientious, but unfortunately for her popularity she was given to preaching; the others resented this and considered her a prig, and much of her influence was thus lost.

The day of the concert arrived, and in the morning the girls were informed of the treat in store for them, as Miss Barker did not think it good for them to know too long beforehand, and never dreamed that the whole school knew of it already. Those who behaved well would have their preparation excused and be allowed to go, those whose conduct was unsatisfactory would stay at home and have additional tasks as well as their ordinary lessons.

"It's a sore struggle," sighed Rose, as they took their places. "If these treats came oftener and some of you would join me, I'd behave badly for the fun of staying at home unwatched, but I don't think I can afford to lose this unwonted gaiety."

All went well till the last lesson, which was French. Now madame was in a bad temper that

morning, owing to the east wind, the girls said, and whenever she was in a bad temper she gave a conversation lesson. The girls' stupidity, ignorance, and bad accent drove her wild, and by the time the lesson ended she was in a state of nervous irritation, and half the class sat in tears and disgrace. Every girl trembled therefore when she announced :

“ Mesdemoiselles, to-day we shall have conversation.”

“ Oh, me, the concert,” sighed Rose. “ There goes my last chance.”

“ Qu'est-ce-que vous dites, Rose ? ” inquired madame sharply.

“ J'ai dit que, que, que— ”

“ Que, que, que ;’ mais c'est bien interessant ; c'est toute á fait comme une oie anglaise, quack, quack,” said madame, with an accent that convulsed the class. Her joke soothed her, and all might have gone well if the girls had been less dull, but they seemed to have forgotten the little they ever knew.

“ They were stupid, they had no brains, they could talk all day long in their own tongue, but when they were to talk in French their little ideas melted away,” declared the angry teacher.

“ The more she scolds the more I seem to have a big hole in my head through which the ideas disappear,” complained Doris afterwards.

The lesson slowly drew to a close, and at last Madame announced that each girl must make one remark, and then she would dismiss the class.

"And none can go to the concert who have not said anything," added madame, as she observed Rose's little jump of joy; "and Mary and Alice will not provide remarks for the rest of the class; each girl will stand out of her place by the wall to speak. And I will not be told that 'le temps fait beau,' or 'nous allons au concert.' I give you five minutes."

Joy at the prospect of release gave way to gloom at these limitations, and there was a mournful silence, at least among the boarders, for the day girls knew that madame's anger could not affect their going, and gave what help they could, which was not much. The five minutes elapsed, and madame, who had forgotten to forbid all mention of the time, was informed that "Il fait presque douze heures," varied by such statements as that "Il est presque midi," and "Il est presque minuit." This topic was promptly forbidden. The next girl said "nous aurons le diner presque bientôt," and the next varied the remark by saying, "Nous aurons dejeuner ce matin." Madame sat scowling, and Dorothy, whose turn now came, could think of nothing. Her neighbour dared not speak, but pointed to pencil, whereupon she gasped out, "J'ai

une pencille." Madame let it pass as the girl was such a beginner, but her comments and the laughter of the others made Dorothy feel like crying. Marjory, in a fit of brilliant inspiration, burst out, "J'ai une père." Rose, who came next, sat and stared at her teacher in despair, in spite of promptings from Doris and cutting remarks from madame.

"I must give up the concert." she sighed, "I can't think of a thing."

Madame did not dislike the bright, fearless girl who could work well enough when she chose, and so with a sneer at her poor little brains she said she would come back to her when she had heard the others. The rest of the class was better, and madame was a little soothed when she returned to Rose and tried to get a sentence from her. It was all in vain, and the class was dismissed. The girls took their books and prepared to go. Rose put her things together slowly and with a sad face. As she reached the door she turned to madame, who had been watching her.

"Will anything do, madame?" she asked.

"Of course. Have I not said so often?"

"Would a riddle do?"

"Certainement. I should be glad to find you had the brains for such a thing. Depêchez-vous donc," said madame, expectantly.

"Well, this is it," said Rose, standing with the door handle in her hand, "Ou était Moïse quand la chandelle était sorti? Dans l'obscurité," she added, as she vanished from the room, leaving the girls laughing and madame gasping.

Everybody went to the concert, and the girls enjoyed the feeling of sitting in their best clothes among nicely dressed people in a well lighted hall, instead of staying in the dull schoolroom working at dull lessons.

Dorothy sat behind Evelyn and Lucy, and was able to overhear some of their remarks. She attacked her sister on the subject when they came home, for though nothing was said by Miss Barker, it was an understood thing that the rule about talking in the bedrooms was relaxed on festive occasions.

"Evelyn," she asked, sternly, "who were those men you were talking about, and how did you come to know them?"

"I don't know any men," answered Evelyn, getting very red.

"I heard you myself," put in Marjory, "and Lucy too. She said, 'Look, there's Sir Clement Wiloughby, how he's staring at us!' And you said, 'There's Lord Orville by the pillar.'"

"Yes," went on Dorothy, full of indignation, "and Lucy answered, 'How he's looking at you! He

always finds out where his dear beautiful Evelina is.' You must tell me, Evelyn."

"You needn't interfere with me," said Evelyn crossly.

"I must look after you; I'm the eldest. Evelyn, tell me about it at once."

A few weeks had not been sufficient to undermine the old habits of obedience, and Evelyn answered reluctantly: "It's all in a book called *Evelina*. We play at it. I'm Evelina, and Lucy is generally Sir Clement Willoughby or Lord Orville, who love me, but sometimes we pretend the men we meet are them."

"Where did you get the book?" asked Dorothy, and at last Evelyn confessed that by Lucy's advice she had subscribed to a library, and that one of the day girls brought in the books, which they managed to read on the sly. She would not own that she was in the wrong, but went to bed sullen and annoyed. Marian waited a little while, after Miss Porter had gone her rounds, and then thinking the others were asleep, slipped out of bed and out of the room so quickly that Dorothy, who was wide awake, had no time to call to her. Full of anxiety for her two young sisters, poor Dorothy tossed about restlessly, and as Marian did not return she went to look for her. Hearing voices in the room opposite, she softly opened the door. A piece of candle in a soap-dish was burning

on the bed, in which the Rowtons, Ada, Nelly, and Marian, had managed to crowd for the better enjoyment of their feast.

Her appearance startled the banqueters so that in the excitement the candle was upset on to the bed. Dorothy rushed forward and picked it up.

"What do you want, creeping about like that?" answered Ada, crossly. "You make one jump with fright, and now the cover's got grease on it and black, and I don't know what we'll do."

"You ought all to be ashamed of yourselves," answered Dorothy. "Marian, come to bed."

"Don't go, Marian," said Ada. "What business has she to order you about?"

"Perhaps I'd better go," said Marian. "It must be rather late."

"Nonsense," cried Ada. "Teach that silly Dolly to mind her own business. It isn't as if she were such a pattern of goodness herself."

Marian hesitated, with one foot on the ground.

"You'd better come, Marian" said Dorothy, trying to keep calm. "You know mamma would not like it."

Marian slowly prepared to follow her.

"Well," sneered Ada, "I'm sure I wouldn't care what my elder sister and my step-mother said. You are a silly, Marian. However, it'll leave all the more

for us. You needn't take the candle, Dorothy. Go and get it, Bessie."

Bessie obediently jumped out of bed, and took the opportunity of pressing a tart and some sweets into Marian's hand. The sisters left the room.

"Marian," said Dorothy, when they were in their room, "did you tell her about mamma?"

"Yes," answered Marian sullenly. "And she said she thought it a mean shame. I don't see why you need come sneaking about and spoiling the fun, especially when I paid my share."

"But you hadn't any money. You told me so."

"Mary lent me some," muttered Marian.

"You got into debt!" cried Dorothy, horrified, while Marjory sat up in bed in dismay.

"You use such silly words," grumbled Marian. "I'm going to pay her as soon as father sends me the money, so it can't be a debt. I'm not going to talk another word; you're horrid," she added, getting into bed. "The others all think you a stuck-up thing, and I'm not going to care any more what you say."

Dorothy went back to her own bed; Marian was soon asleep, but her eldest sisters lay awake for a long time, talking in low whispers of her and Evelyn, and wondering what they ought to do.

Next morning most of the girls were very cross and sleepy, and in the afternoon they were sent for a

long walk, which somewhat revived them. Dorothy repaid Mary in order to wipe off as quickly as possible the disgraceful debt, and she tried to reason with Marian, but the girl was sullen, and would not listen to them, and Ada encouraged her in her rebellion.

CHAPTER XIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISGRACE.

MATTERS did not improve during the next week. Ada and Lucy seemed to be doing their best to counteract Dorothy's influence, so that Marian and Evelyn would no longer listen to her, and she overheard various remarks about unkind step-mothers that hurt her more than anything, for hers was a loyal heart, and she did not like the family troubles to be made a matter of public discussion. Marjory did not cheer her, for she was gloomy and irritable because she thought Dorothy did not want her, now she had Rose. Dorothy thought of writing home and sending the letter through a day girl, but she was afraid it would not be much use. "Probably father will tell

mamma not to trouble, now Easter is so near, and as she is rather weak she will listen to him," said Dorothy to Marjory, in whom she regularly confided in spite of her sister's gloom, for she had no idea that she had anything to do with it, and only thought that Marjory was as miserable and worried as herself about the others.

"Especially as she believes that we are quite happy here. She's sure to think we're talking nonsense," said Marjory, "or exaggerating."

"And then there's that mother-in-law in the house now," went on Dorothy. "If only we were safe at home, or it were any use writing to father. I don't know what to do."

"It's nearly Easter," said Marjory, "and then we shall go home and explain everything."

"Perhaps it won't do much harm to wait," assented Dorothy. "It's barely a fortnight to Easter, and then we shall go home, and fifty mothers-in-law won't get me back. After all, I'd rather not write a letter on the sly if it can be helped. There's Miss Barker calling me," she added, and ran out of the front schoolroom, to which she and Marjory had retired for a private conference. There was no fire there now school was over, but it was very warm weather, and the spring seemed to be coming in good earnest.



"HERE ARE SOME LETTERS FOR YOU, DOROTHY!"

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"Here are some letters for you, Dorothy," said Miss Barker. "I hope you will persuade your parents to send your sisters back with you, for they seem to be disgracefully backward."

Dorothy took the letters and went back to Marjory.

"How it spoils one's letters to have them **read** by strangers," she said, as she sat down with Marjory by her side, and they began to read together. The first letter was from Mrs. Marshall, just a few lines saying she was very busy now her mother was there, so that she could not write much. She and their father were looking forward to their return at Easter, and hoped they would look well and happy. She thought they would find Mrs. Leigh a pleasant addition to the family, and hoped they did not mean to regard her as a stranger. Then there was a letter in which Elinor and Isabel had written alternate lines, ill-spelt, ill-written, and blotted

DEAR GIRLS,—It is nerely Estar and you will soon be home. We are all very glad and hope you will not go away again. Mrs. Leigh, our stepgrandmother, is very nice and jolly. I (Elinor) am improving in my temper and my spelng, mamma says. I (Isabel) am becoming very tidy and fond of needle-work, Elinor shook the table, so the blot is her fault. Father thinks he will be made M.P. because his constitooshun is getting very fond of him. We are all well. We can right no more.—Your loving sisters,

ELINOR and ISABEL

Then came a wee note from Winifred, who had disdained the use of lines, and whose letters were alternately very big and very small; the whole, judging from its appearance, had probably been blotted with a pocket handkerchief, instead of blotting-paper.

DEAR SISTERS,—I am quite well. We are all quite well. Mama has a hedack. I can rede and I can rite and I can spel, and Mama says I am a very useful little gurl.—Your loving friend,

WINIFRED.

“Winifred seems very fond of mamma,” said Marjory.

“She so loves to be petted, and mamma is so ready to do it,” answered Dorothy, “I must really ask her not to spoil her.”

“Letters do make one homesick,” sighed Marjory, as they went into the other room to let their sisters hear the news.

Nothing particular happened during the next few days; neither Marian nor Evelyn improved, but the holidays were so near that Dorothy by Rose’s advice left them alone, and, as the latter said, there would be less difficulty in getting them to see the error of their ways when they were removed from their present influences.

But now a terrible blow fell upon them. One morning Miss Barker announced that she had

decided to give only a few days' holiday at Easter, from the Thursday afternoon till the Tuesday morning; that a fortnight's holiday would be given at Whitsuntide, and that those girls who came from a distance would therefore spend Easter at school, and not go home till Whitsuntide. Her announcement filled all with dismay. Then Dorothy rose: "Does that mean that my sisters and I are to stay here now?" she asked with trembling voice.

"Certainly, Dorothy," returned Miss Barker. "It would not be worth while for you to go home, neither would it be possible for you to return to school on a bank holiday."

"We could come a day later," said Dorothy.

"In the first place you cannot afford to lose one day's schooling, in the second place your parents evidently find the arrangement very convenient, for your mother writes that it will be a much better plan than if you come now," answered Miss Barker coldly. "Sit down at once, and do not attempt to discuss the matter further."

Dorothy was stunned; her last hope had deserted her, and her mother had been false to her. What Mrs. Marshall really wrote was to the effect that Miss Barker's arrangement was a great disappointment to all as they were longing to see the girls, but as they seemed happy it would be best not

to interfere with their school work, and "perhaps," she added, "it will be better for various reasons, into which I cannot enter now, if they come a little later."

The Marshalls were thoroughly miserable, and a feeling of disappointment pervaded the school. Even Mary was depressed, for, as she said, "It is hard to have it come on you so suddenly. Just when you count three days more, you have weeks and weeks tacked on."

"Yes," said Rose. "It's most unfair. Of course, I don't have a lively time at home, but the thing is this. I arrange my industry and my interest in my lessons to spread over just the time that term lasts. Of course this short term I concentrated it, so it's all spent, and I've nothing left."

"I don't think you ever have much," remarked Alice.

"Dear poet, I didn't say I had," returned Rose. "But that doesn't alter the fact that I've none left for the coming weeks. I've no doubt from what I've heard, my ancestors beat the ant at industry, but I'm not a hereditary genius."

"Couldn't you borrow from next term?" suggested Doris.

"I'm ashamed of you, Doris, when in your Shakespearian studies you have learnt 'neither a borrower nor a something else be,' and I make

Shakespeare my master, and am neither. Well, I'm sorry for my teachers, but perhaps I shall manage to achieve my aim in life. Come along, girls, there's dinner."

Rose's present aim in life was to be expelled, because she did not see any other way of leaving the school, but though she did her best to drive her teachers to desperation her hopes were small, for she did not believe Miss Barker would willingly send away a pupil. "Not that I shall be better off when I am sent away," she said, "but it would be a change. Only I'm afraid Miss B. won't give up my reformation."

She tried hard to cheer her friend, but Dorothy was past cheering, for the responsibility she **felt** for her sisters was becoming a very heavy burden. But matters came to a climax for both. Evelyn and Marian fell into dire disgrace. One of the lending library novels was discovered, and Lucy so contrived that the blame fell on Evelyn, and she appeared an innocent victim of the latter's depravity. Now Evelyn had her faults, but she was a **Marshall**, and she would rather suffer any punishment herself than betray another. She neither contradicted Lucy, nor did she say who had given her the book, and she uncomplainingly ate her dry bread and went to bed at seven o'clock; but she sternly refused Lucy's sym-

pathy, and told Dorothy and Marjory that she would never be friends with her again. Marian's conduct was worse, for it was discovered at the history examination that was held on the Thursday before Good Friday that she had cheated, having contrived to make use of a piece of paper on which various dates and facts were written. Less proud than Evelyn, she accused the others of doing the same, and declared that they made her do it, but she was not believed. Her term's marks were forfeited, no one was allowed to speak to her, she was sent to bed for the rest of the day, and was ordered to go to bed at seven for a week. She cried and went about miserable and wretched. Dorothy determined to speak to her, but for fear of getting her into worse trouble she sought Miss Barker's permission, which she obtained after listening to a long lecture on her own and her sisters' faults. "It's a good thing you are not going **home now**," concluded Miss Barker, "for the influence of a good school is what you require, and if your parents listened to me they would not let you go home till the long vacation."

Dorothy and Marjory talked long with Marian, but she **only** sobbed and cried, and declared she was not worse than the others. "They all cheat, and Ada said I should be a sneak if I didn't, and **they'd send** me to Coventry, and I was so afraid I

should not be able to answer, and I couldn't have without the paper, and I hate it so when they say: 'Marian Marshall last as usual,' and all the girls laugh, even Ada."

It was no use talking to her while she continued in this frame of mind, and Dorothy sat by her not knowing what to do till Mary stole in: "Poor Marian," she said, "she will be ill if she cries so. I know it's wrong, but I'll stay by her a little if you'll go down and try and quiet her." And Mary, who never got into trouble or disobeyed her teachers, sat down by the sobbing child and soothed her till she fell asleep, whereupon she went to tell Miss Barker what she had done, and Miss Barker, a little perplexed at her best pupil's conduct, first lectured her and then forgave her.

"I know you all think me dull, because I work hard and don't get into trouble," said Mary, when Dorothy thanked her. "But I must work, because we're a big family, and not rich, and I shall have to help the others. And then it isn't really so wonderful of me, because, somehow, I don't feel tempted to break rules."

"A sad defect in your nature, Mary," said Rose. "And one you ought to contend against."

CHAPTER XIV.

A SOLEMN COUNCIL.

IT was Saturday afternoon, and though it was holiday time, Rose was condemned to an hour's practice in the music room, because Miss Young had complained of her playing. She was playing the same piece over and over again, making as many mistakes as there were notes in the bar, and if by chance she played one correctly, she conscientiously went back and played it wrong. Miss Barker looked in.

"Rose, take more pains over your playing," she said, "and do not let the fire out."

"Certainly, Miss Barker," she replied politely, but when she heard the front door shut, she rushed to the window, made a grimace at Miss Barker and Miss Smith, who had gone out together, and began to dance a jig of satisfaction. Then she returned to the piano, and began to play a funeral march as an air of triumph. The door opened again and Dorothy came in.

"Have you nearly finished Rose?" she asked.

"Miss B.'s gone out for the rest of the day,"



"SHE . . . TWIRLED ROUND ON THE MUSIC-STOOL."

answered Rose, "and I'm quite at your disposal. What a pity you're so unmusical, Dorothy, you can't appreciate the beauty of my playing," she added as she finished her piece with a few chords of her own invention, and twirled round on the music stool. "Cheer up old girl. Don't look so gloomy."

"I must speak to you about Marian and Evelyn," answered Dorothy. "Something must be done. If we wait till the holidays it will be too late, in fact I can't bear it any longer."

"Let's sit by the fire and have a consultation," said Rose. "Where are the others?"

"In the schoolroom. Doris is reading an exciting book to them, and Miss Porter gave Marjory and me permission to go into the front schoolroom and talk. I'll just call Marjory."

Marjory came in, and the three girls sat on the floor round the fire. Rose produced the inevitable bag of sweets, but the others were not in the mood for them, for they were really troubled.

"Well," said Rose, "never mind. Let's open the conference, and we'll feel more inclined for refreshments afterwards."

"We want to get away," said Dorothy. "I don't see how I can let Marian and Evelyn stay here after what has happened. They have done wrong, but making them miserable won't make them better, and

they may get worse. Besides, Marian is making herself quite ill."

"Yes," said Marjory. "I don't know if Evelyn would make it up with Lucy, but Ada has been trying to be friends with Marian, and Marian is sure to give in because she hates not to be friends with people."

"Besides, it's not good for her if the teachers keep on making nasty remarks about her deceitfulness," went on Dorothy. "I'm sure if she's not trusted it will make her worse."

"But what do you want to do?" asked Rose.

"To get away from here," said Dorothy quietly.

"Do you mean to run away?"

"Yes, since there's no other way."

"Couldn't you try writing home?" asked Rose, after a short silence.

"What's the use? Father never answers, and mamma wrote to Miss Barker that she approved of our staying till Whitsuntide."

"I should like to see that letter," said Rose.

"And Whitsuntide is so far off," sighed Marjory.

"The summer's further," rejoined Rose.

"What do you mean?" asked Dorothy.

"Why," returned Rose, "how can you be certain after what has happened that she will not

persuade your parents to let you stay till the summer holidays, so that you may get on with your lessons?"

"I'm afraid of that, too," said Dorothy, beginning to tug at her plait, and then she recounted Miss Barker's words.

"She's sure to try it," said Rose decidedly. "There's no doubt of that. Couldn't you telegraph 'Come at once'?"

"And suppose they telegraph back: 'Why?'" asked Dorothy.

"Well, of course, you know your people best, but if that won't do there'll be nothing left but for you to run away, and we must just think out a plan. I wish I could go with you; this place is only fit for a saint."

"A saint!" cried the others, astonished.

"Yes, one of those people who sat on towers and mortified themselves. They'd have thoroughly enjoyed themselves here where there are so many chances of mortification, but for an ordinary sinner like me the place isn't healthy. Oh, dear, if only they'd expel me!"

They sat staring at the fire in silence. Then Rose began:

"If we can only find out if Miss Barker is out on Monday evening, that would be a good day to go.

Miss Porter is to be away the night, and I've an idea that, unbeknown, Miss B. will also be away."

"That would be all right," said Dorothy. "Miss Porter is kind, so I'm glad she won't get the blame."

"Besides which Miss Smith is easily hoodwinked," said Rose. "In that case you could go to bed early on some excuse or other, and be off by the night train. I'll tell you what," she went on, wriggling backwards and forwards in her excitement, "I'll go and ask Nanny the housemaid's help. She likes me, and she's engaged to a guard on the London train, and she's leaving this month because she means to be married soon. She told me all about it. I'll fetch her up," and she ran out of the room.

She had not been gone a minute when the door opened, and Ada came in.

"So that's where you are," she said. "What a nice fire!" The girls were annoyed at her coming, for they attributed Marian's disgrace to her influence, and they knew she was not to be trusted. Neither spoke.

"You needn't be so glum," said Ada. "I can't help Marian's trouble, though of course you blame me. You might be friends."

"Did you want anything?" asked Dorothy.

"I came to see what you were doing, and to ask you to be friends," answered Ada. "Do, and then

I'll tell you a lovely secret." She sat down, and went on, too full of her secret to ask further forgiveness: "I overheard Miss Smith telling Miss Porter that Miss Barker is going away all Monday till Tuesday morning, but we're not to know. And Miss Smith has been asked by a friend to come and see her, so she means to pack us off early on some pretence, and go out, for Miss B. doesn't mind as long as we are in bed and don't know. Lucky my ears are so sharp or we'd have lost the chance. Won't it be fun?"

"Yes," replied Dorothy joyfully, for of course this arrangement greatly facilitated her plans. "It will be nice."

"Aren't you coming to the schoolroom?" asked Ada, rising. "We're just going to play blind man's buff to get warm. Pooh, how cold it's grown these last days! I believe it's going to snow."

Dorothy got up. "I may as well come," she said, not knowing how to rid herself of Ada. "Will you come, Marjory?" She touched Marjory unnoticed, and the latter, taking the hint, answered, "No, I don't feel inclined to romp."

At the schoolroom door Dorothy stopped: "I'll fetch Rose if you'll go in," she said, in desperation, hardly hoping to be successful. "She loves a romp."

"All right," said Ada. "I suppose she's been sent to tidy her drawers. I'll tell the others to

wait." She went into the schoolroom, closing the door behind her, and Rose suddenly slipped out of the darkness by the kitchen stairs, where she had been standing unnoticed and softly turned the key in the lock. Then she motioned to Dorothy to go on, and the two girls and Nanny, who was behind Rose, rejoined Marjory.

"Oh, what a lovely escape!" cried Rose, throwing herself down on the floor. "Dorothy, you showed real presence of mind."

"That's the worst of this place. You have to be deceiving," sighed Dorothy, taking her old place.

"Don't be conscientious at this late hour of the day," cried Rose. "Sit down, Nanny, and let's consult. Nanny understands the state of affairs, and you've got all her sympathies, and so on."

"I don't mind helping," said Nanny, "and I know Jack won't, for of all nasty places, this is the worst. So I'll tell you what I've thought. I shall see him tomorrow, and we'll settle about the train. I believe he's going to London with a late one, else he'll get one of his mates to look after you and take tickets and all that. Then how about your luggage?"

"They must leave that," cried Rose. "That won't matter, for I believe Miss Barker's honest in the matter of clothes."

"They'll need plenty of wraps, if it's as cold as

it is to-night," went on Nanny. "I'll tell you what: I know a girl that's got a young man that's got a brother, and his girl's brother keeps a fly, which shall be waiting for you round the corner."

"The girls are rather muddling," said Rose, "but as long as the fly's clear, it's all right. You didn't hear a bell, Nanny?" she asked, as a violent peal resounded through the house.

"No, no, miss. What a queer thing to ask!" responded Nanny gravely.

"But," cried Dorothy, as a sudden thought struck her, "we've no money—at least, not enough. Marjory and I have each ten shillings, but that isn't enough, and I know the others have none."

"And I never have any," sighed Rose regretfully. "It's mostly spent before I have it, and all I have now is a lucky shilling."

"I'll manage," said Nanny. "If I haven't enough, Jack will help, and you can send it from home."

"And the girl's young man's girl's brother could help," added Rose. "That's a good sentence. I'll give it next grammar lesson."

"But suppose you both get into trouble?" suggested Marjory.

"I'm leaving, anyhow," answered Nanny cheerfully.

"And I want to," cried Rose. "They can't sen-

tence us to prison, so what does it matter if we are discovered? Oh, dear!" she added stretching herself. "I'm getting reckless. My conscience is not what it used to be."

"Then that's settled," said Nanny, and I suppose we'd better open the door, and I must get tea, for I'm alone in the kitchen to-day."

"Let me manage," cried Rose, jumping up. "By the bye, Dorothy, don't you think you'd better keep the secret from Marian and Evelyn till the last moment?"

Dorothy assented, and then they went into the schoolroom, where the bell was ringing unceasingly while the prisoners banged and hammered at the door. Rose turned the handle.

"What have you done to the door?" she cried.
"It won't open."

"We don't know," shouted Doris. "Ada thought Dorothy locked it."

"Ada's a fibber," cried Rose. "I expect the lock's gone wrong, like it did before. I'll fetch Nanny."

After some manœuvring and discussion between Nanny and Rose the latter opened the door with a sudden jerk that sent Lucy, who was standing near, staggering back, so that three or four girls fell on the top of each other.

"It seemed stuck," said Rose to Miss Porter, who was looking rather alarmed.

"Didn't you hear us, Nanny?" asked the teacher. "We've been ringing for full a quarter of an hour.

"You see I've been busy, Miss Porter, as I'm alone at home," answered Nanny, "and I must hurry down and get the tea."

"How lucky I'd finished what I was doing!" exclaimed Rose. "I said I thought I heard a bell to Dorothy and Marjory who were with me. Don't you think, Miss Porter, sound carries badly in cold weather?" she went on gravely, while Miss Porter declined to discuss the matter, and sent all the boarders to tidy themselves for tea.

CHAPTER XV.

A MIDNIGHT JOURNEY.

SUNDAY passed quietly, but Marjory and Dorothy thought it would never end. The weather had turned very cold, and there was every sign of a heavy

snowstorm. When the girls came back from afternoon service, shivering and freezing, a few flakes were beginning to fall, and next morning they found the world covered with snow. The morning was fair, but in the afternoon the snow began to fall rapidly and the girls were glad to sit together in the warm schoolroom. Miss Porter had gone away directly after breakfast, Miss Barker went soon after dinner, quite unconscious that everybody knew of her intended absence till next morning. Nanny had made all the necessary arrangements, and the Marshalls had nothing to do but to be at the station in time for the train. As it was Bank Holiday there were extra trains running, and in order to avoid discovery before Miss Smith's departure it was settled that they should go by the last one. Rose helped her fellow conspirators put up their rugs with a heavy heart.

"It's very good of me to help you," she said, as she sat on the bed and struggled with a strap. "How horrid it will be when you are gone! I only hope I shall be found out and expelled."

"We'll get father to talk to your uncle," said Dorothy.

"That won't be much use, we're such a pigheaded family," replied Rose, as she gave a tug that pulled the strap through, "but I think it's time I was taken

away. I'm really not given to lying and plotting, but since I've been here I've gone all wrong, and soon I'll be too bad for you to be friends with me."

Dorothy put her arm round her, rather to Marjory's surprise.

"Never, Rose," she said. "In the first place you won't get so bad, and then we shall never forget what you've done for us."

Rose kissed her. Then she jumped up and laughed. "There, that's done, and if my character worries me, I suppose it's because of the cold. Let's go down."

The girls readily went to bed early at Miss Smith's suggestion because they knew she was going out, and they meant to enjoy themselves. Ada and Lucy came to the Marshalls' room to urge Evelyn and Marian to join them in a feast which they were giving in Lucy's room, but they refused, and the two girls went off without wasting more time on "such hopeless sillies." The Marshalls got into bed, Miss Smith gave a hasty glance into the room, and five minutes afterwards the front door slammed. Then Dorothy got up and lit the candle.

"Get up Evelyn and Marian," she said, in a low voice, coming to their bedside. "Get up and dress, for we are going home."

“Home,” cried Marian joyfully, jumping up, while Evelyn sat up and stared.

“Hush! yes,” answered Dorothy. “Don’t speak so loudly. Get up and put on your warmest clothes; here they are, all ready for you. It’s all arranged, and we’ll tell you about it afterwards.”

“Are we sent for?” asked Evelyn, while Marian, trembling all over, began to dress as quickly as she could.

“No, we are running away; get up,” said Marjory. There was a soft tap at the door, and Rose whispered to them to open, for Marjory had locked it. She was admitted half dressed, and with the rest of her things over her arm. “I’ve told Alice I was coming here,” she said; “as Doris is in Lucy’s room, it’s all right as long as we keep your door locked.”

“Why have you got your hat and jacket?” asked Marjory.

“I’m going to see the last of you,” answered Rose. “I’m not going to lose all the fun. I’m sure I don’t know what I wish for most, to go with you or stay and see Miss B.’s face when she hears you’re gone.”

The girls dressed as quickly as possible, and went down, Rose locking the door behind them and putting the key in her pocket. They went into the kitchen, where Nanny had spread the table and was

waiting. She slipped upstairs, locked the door leading to the kitchen stairs, and came back.

"You must have a good supper," she said, "for you'll have a cold journey, and I've put you up some sandwiches and cakes."

"Did you get the sweets and peppermint?" asked Rose, and on Nanny's giving them to her she solemnly presented the parcels to Dorothy as a parting gift.

Marian and Evelyn were too astonished to talk much, and the other three were so excited that they did not know what they were saying.

"It's a blessing Miss Barker's out," said Nanny. "I've got an evening out, and the other two have taken one, for we're all provided with keys, and Miss Smith has the latchkey, so as we poor servants needn't sit up."

"Then there'll be only the girls left," cried Rose. "What fun if a burglar came!"

"Well, Miss Hartley, I'm not so sure of the fun, but it's not **very** likely."

"There's one," cried Rose, as a tap came at the area door.

Nanny went to the door, and came back with a man whose hat and coat were white with snow.

"This is Mr. Jones, who has the fly," she said.

"Then we'd better start soon," said Dorothy,

anxiously, "for it will be difficult to get to the station now it's snowing."

"There's plenty of time," answered Rose. "Finish your supper, and I daresay Mr. Jones won't mind something."

Mr. Jones sat down to supper rather embarrassed, and Nanny asked the girls if they were warmly wrapped up.

"We've all our warmest things on," said Dorothy "so we shall be all right."

"Miss Hartley, you'd better stay at home," suggested Nanny, but Rose utterly refused.

"I'm warmly dressed," she said. "And I've got my ulster, and I don't mean to miss the fun."

They grew so fidgety that they started before it was necessary. They drove slowly, for the streets were in a bad state, and the wind was fierce and cutting, so that they were thankful not to have to walk. When they reached the station they found it crowded with people, who were returning to London by the last train.

"We shall never find room," exclaimed Dorothy in dismay.

"Jack will have seen to that," answered Nanny reassuringly, "he takes this train, and will keep an eye upon you. Don't you be afraid; he thinks it the best joke going."

They would not go into the waiting-room, but stood in a dark corner while Mr. Jones went to find the guard. The Marshalls felt sick with fear lest they should be discovered, though there was not the slightest danger, and even Rose ventured only on an occasional whisper till the men came up to them and escorted them through the crowd to the train. They had only been able to scrape together sufficient money for third-class tickets, but Jack put them into a first-class compartment.

"I'll make it all right," he said. "The train's overcrowded as it is, and if anybody's going to ride first-class for third-class fare it may just as well be you. The other seats are engaged for two ladies and two gentlemen, so you'll be quite comfortable, and I'll see to footwarmers."

The girls got into the carriage, and Rose and Nanny joined them till the real passengers came. Then the footwarmers were brought, Rose and Nanny said good-bye, and got out, and the door was locked. Rose banged at the window, and one of the gentlemen put it down for her.

"Write soon," she cried, "I long to know how you get on. Mind you tell me everything, and I'll do the same for you."

"Yes," said Dorothy, "and I haven't thanked Nanny and you."

"Bother," interrupted Rose. "You'd better put the window up."

"Come along, Miss," cried Nanny, taking her arm, "we must be getting back, for I feel rather nervous with the house left like that," and the two quickly disappeared in the crowd.

The train was late in starting, and the girls felt uneasy till they had left the station behind them. Owing to the presence of the strangers, they could not talk freely, so they wrapped themselves in their rugs and sat silent, save for an occasional whisper. One of the passengers remarked that they were going to have a cold journey, and a lady asked the girls if they were going to London. Then everyone became silent and drowsy.

"Surely we're making a very long stop here."

Everybody sat up startled into wakefulness by the sudden remark of one of the gentlemen.

"I didn't notice," answered his wife. "I was sleeping."

"It's fully half an hour since we stopped, and it seems to me I hear shouting, but there's such a wind, I can't be certain."

Outside nothing was to be seen save the whirling snow. The last speaker opened the window, but the wind was so violent, and the snow blew in so that he was obliged to shut it, and they sat nervous

and full of conjectures till the light of a lantern fell on the window. The next minute the guard came in pulling the door to after him. "The train before us has broken down, and it may be hours before the line is clear. Here's a warm rug for you," he went on, looking at the girls. "I brought it with me in case you got cold." They were sitting two on each side, so he put it over their knees and wrapped them up well in it.

"Shall we go to Bath?" asked Dorothy, in alarm.

"You'd rather stay here for ever, wouldn't you?" he answered, laughing. "Don't you be afraid. You're safe enough, for we're too far from Bath to go back. Only we shall be late in London, for we've got to wait of course till the line's clear. But we're not going back to Bath, and nobody from Bath can catch you now."

He went away, and the strangers looked curiously at the girls, and would have begun conversation, but the answers were so shy and brief that they gave it up, and began to talk together. After a while they offered the Marshalls refreshments, but they declined, as they had some of their own. Dorothy gave each of her sisters some sandwiches, cakes, and sweets, and gradually everyone became silent again.

Dorothy and Marjory sat side by side, and the

latter asked in a low whisper. "Do you think it's dangerous, Dorothy?"

"I can't remember," whispered Dorothy. "I hope it isn't."

"I do wish I'd been better," sighed Marjory. "Dorothy, you don't know how horrid and jealous I've been about you."

"Jealous?" asked Dorothy, astonished.

"Yes, first because I thought you cared most about mamma, and then because of Rose. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Why, how funny!" returned Dorothy. "Surely you couldn't think I loved them best?"

"I don't know," answered Marjory slowly. "I think I did. Anyhow, I had horrid feelings, and if we escape from this danger I never, never will be so again."

Dorothy squeezed her sister's hand under the rug.

"Don't mind it," she whispered. "I don't. But I shall be glad when we're home, and I really mean to try and be very obedient, and not always think I know better than mamma."

"But you are always in the right," returned Marjory quickly.

"Not always," answered Dorothy; and then they talked for a little while about school and their flight, and then they too grew silent, and fell into fitful

dozes, from which they were roused after some hours by the moving of the train. At the next station hot coffee was brought them by the guard, their foot-warmers were refilled, and at last they started for the final stage of their journey. They slept a good deal, but they were stiff, cold, and weary when they finally reached Paddington at nine o'clock the next morning. The guard advised them to go to the waiting room till the crowd had dispersed, and when by Dorothy's desire a cab was procured to take them home they parted from their friend with many thanks. It was hard work for the horses, for in London also there had been a violent snowstorm, and though it was already beginning to thaw the roads were heavy with mud.

The people in the street looked frozen and miserable, and hurried past as quickly as they could, through the mud and the biting wind. In spite of cold and fatigue the girls began to get excited as they recognised the familiar streets, and they wished the horses would go faster.

"I wonder what father and mamma will say, and whether they will be angry," observed Marian.

"Angry," cried Dorothy, in astonishment. "What at?"

"At our running away."

"As it was the only thing to be done there is

nothing for them to be angry at," returned Dorothy decidedly, for she was so fully convinced of the necessity for the step she had taken that it never entered her head that she might be blamed.

"Shall you tell about me?" asked Marian anxiously.

"You can tell yourself if you like, but they must know," replied Dorothy, so firmly that Marian knew there was no escape.

"You can tell them, but not when I'm there, or the little ones," she said, after a pause, and Dorothy promised.

The heavy roads made it impossible for the horses to go quickly, and it was nearly twelve when the cab stopped at the Marshalls' door. Jane opened and stared in astonishment as the girls rushed past her without waiting for an answer to their question as to whether their father was in, and ran to the study. Mr. Marshall was sitting on one side of the fire, an unknown lady sat on the other with Winifred on her knee, while Elinor and Isabel crouched on the rug. All five looked thoroughly happy and comfortable, and a sense of relief came over the wanderers at the thought that they were really at home. The girls jumped up with exclamations of astonishment, and their father stared in surprise.

"Where on earth did you come from?" he asked.

"From Bath," answered Dorothy. "We——"

"We've had a terrible journey," interrupted Marian, rushing up to him and kissing him. "I thought we should never see our home again."

"The train before us broke down," explained Dorothy. "We left Bath last night by the last train, and we've been on the way ever since."

"Oh, poor children! they must be starved with cold and hunger," cried the strange lady, jumping up. "Let me take off your things, my poor little girl," and she began to pull off Marjory's wraps as quickly as possible.

"That's the mother-in-law, Dorothy," said her father, laughing.

Mrs. Leigh looked up and nodded at Dorothy. "That won't prevent us being friends," she said. "Won't you order some food for these wanderers before questioning them further?"

"Oh, yes," cried Dorothy, glad to change the subject, "we are so hungry and our feet are frozen. Do let us have breakfast."

"Bacon and eggs and toast and coffee, real home coffee," said Evelyn, "and lots and lots of it."

"Oh," sighed Marjory, who had been taking off her things in silence, "don't speak of such nice things. It's like a dream."

"But how is it you've come home?" asked Mr. Marshall.

"Where's mamma?" asked Dorothy. "I'll explain when she's here."

"Mamma's in bed, and there's a new baby," cried the younger girls.

"A baby?" cried the runaways in amazement.

"Yes," shouted Isabel dancing about, "a real live baby!"

"Whose baby?" asked Dorothy, who was kneeling on the floor unfastening her boots.

"Why ours, of course," cried Elinor, hopping on one foot. It came last night, and we were surprised, because it's so long since there's been one in the family."

"Everybody was surprised," said Winifred, who was unfastening Evelyn's boots. "Father was quite red with surprise when he told us."

"Well," said Dorothy emphatically, as she banged her boot on the floor and stood up. "Then I can only say I hope she hasn't got red hair, and that you'll never send her to a boarding school."

"It isn't a her, it's a he!" cried the others all together.

"What?" The four eldest girls stared in amazement.

"Is it really a boy, father?" asked Dorothy, white with excitement.

"Yes, old girl. It's a real live boy, so the fatal spell is broken."

"Then he's your son and heir," she went on.

"Even so, Dorothy, and at present his hair's brown."

"Then he will inherit the estate, and I needn't marry George?"

"Exactly. I should think you'd feel grateful to your mother."

"I didn't think her capable of it," answered the girl, sitting down, and then she burst into tears, while her father sat and laughed. She soon recovered, and they all asked question after question. Then Miss Daly came in, delighted to see them, and then the breakfast was brought.

"The first good meal we've had since we left home," said Marian, after they had eaten in silence for ten minutes.

"I feel strong enough to see that baby now," said Dorothy.

"This afternoon, perhaps," answered Mr. Marshall. "We shall have to break the news of your arrival gently to your mother. By the bye, are you sufficiently recovered to tell me why Miss Barker sent you

home in this strange fashion. Was it measles or small-pox?"

"She didn't send us. We ran away."

"Ran away!" Everyone looked at them in astonishment.

"It was not possible for us to stay," returned Dorothy quietly. "Our characters were being ruined, but I would rather explain by-and-by."

"I am just going away," said Mrs. Leigh, who had been helping Miss Daly attend to their wants, and who thought Dorothy did not like to speak before her.

"As you are one of the family now," said Dorothy, "perhaps you ought to know."

"She's our grandmother," cried Isabel, "and we call her that, so you mustn't tell us not to."

"Isabel is developing into the family despot in your absence, Dorothy," said her father, laughing, and then Marian and Evelyn, who shrank from being present when their misdeeds were revealed, went to the schoolroom with the younger ones, while Dorothy told her tale with Marjory's aid. Mr. Marshall was intensely amused, and Miss Daly was moved to tears at all her dear pupils had gone through. Mrs. Leigh said nothing, but now and then she found it difficult not to laugh at the girls' statements.

"Well," said Mr. Marshall, "next time somebody

else can find a school for you, since my choice was a failure, in spite of all my trouble. Don't you think so, Mrs. Leigh?"

"Was it very much trouble?" asked the lady, smiling.

"There you hit on the weak point," he answered. "I suppose I ought to be very angry, but as I am part to blame in the matter, and as it really is a tremendous joke, I feel rather forgiving, for I must say," he went on, putting his arm round Dorothy, "I am glad to have my girls home."

"Then don't scold, father," said Dorothy, kissing him with an unwonted outbreak of affection. "Of course we ought not to have run away, but I felt it would not do to stay longer, and you know writing to you wouldn't have been any use, and Miss Barker made me think mamma didn't want us."

"I suppose she meant it for your best," observed Mrs. Leigh.

"Yes," answered Dorothy, "she meant well, but she didn't do well."

"Hadn't you better send a telegram?" asked Mrs. Leigh, and Mr. Marshall said he would do so presently; but he forgot all about it till he received a frantic one from Miss Barker.

In the afternoon the seven sisters were taken to see Mrs. Marshall and the baby, and they were full of

delight and wonder at his size, because, as Elinor said, "It's so long since we were born that we can't remember what we looked like."

Mrs. Marshall was very happy at having her four big girls back, and told them so. They were not allowed to stay long in the room, but soon trooped out joyfully. Dorothy came back again, and stood looking down at the sleeping baby.

"I shall never forget that you have saved me from my fate, and I shall call you mother ever after," she said, and she stooped down and kissed Mrs. Marshall, and then ran from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME DELIGHTS.

THE girls were too delighted at being at home again to settle down to anything, and the presence of their little brother added to their joy. Mrs. Leigh very soon won their hearts, for she did not interfere with what they considered their rights, and she not

only shared their amusements but she was constantly suggesting new entertainments and occupations. The thaw followed quickly on the snow-storm, and then spring seemed to have come in good earnest, so that as soon as the roads were dry, they were able to go for long walks. Then, too, Mrs. Leigh declared that she must see London, and the girls accompanied her on many a delightful expedition. She could tell them so much that the museums and show-places which till now they thought rather dull became very interesting to them.

"She doesn't lecture about it, she just tells so that it seems real," said Dorothy one day, when they had gathered round Mrs. Marshall's couch in the morning-room. "I suppose she does it to instruct us, but I don't feel like it, so I don't mind."

"Yes," said Elinor, thoughtfully. "It's wonderful what a lot she knows for an American."

Mrs. Leigh laughed. "Thank you for the compliment, Elinor," she said. "But, Dorothy, it's a bad look out for your future education if you object to all formal instruction."

"I wish there needn't be any future education. We're so happy as we are," sighed Marian, who was slowest in losing the impression of her days at school, and who had as yet recovered neither her health nor her spirits.

"Do you want us to start lessons again, mother?" asked Dorothy submissively.

"I don't think it would hurt you to do a little regular work," answered Mrs. Marshall, gently.

"It's nearly summer," remarked Dorothy. "I shouldn't think it would matter waiting till the autumn."

Mrs. Marshall hesitated. "Would you dislike it so very much?" she began.

"Yes," answered Dorothy, "but as I told you, I shall do what you wish, only I don't think holidays will hurt us."

She had had a long talk with her mother, in which she expressed her intention of being guided by her, and she really tried hard, for the birth of a "son and heir" had quite altered her opinion of Mrs. Marshall's weak character. Still, instinctively she fell back in her old ways when any serious discussion was started, while Mrs. Marshall, who had resolved to be very firm, was so pleased to have her back, and so touched by her efforts, and so anxious to atone for all that she had endured, that there was some danger of the old state of affairs being restored. Mrs. Leigh never interfered unless her opinion was asked, but then she said straight out what she thought, and the girls had a great respect for her though she was "only an American."

"I don't suppose we shall go away before July," remarked Mrs. Marshall.

"What's your opinion, grandmother?" asked Dorothy.

"I think you ought to do a little work," answered Mrs. Leigh, looking up from her knitting. "Else you will find it very hard after the summer, and if you go to school again, you will have so much to make up."

"Oh, I hope we shan't go to school," cried Marian. "I'm quite satisfied with Miss Daly."

"So am I," said Isabel. "She has an excellent influence on us all."

"I don't know," said Dorothy doubtfully. "She's very kind, and all that, but hateful as the lessons were at Albion House, somehow there was more in them, and we knew nothing and felt so ignorant."

"I didn't," murmured Evelyn, "it didn't worry me."

"I didn't like it," said Marjory.

"I hated to be laughed at," added Marian.

"There are too many of you for Miss Daly, so she cannot attend to you as much as you require," said Mrs. Marshall, who was afraid something might be repeated to Miss Daly that would hurt her feelings. "Supposing you don't bother your brains about the future till the time comes, and then we'll see. And meanwhile work just a little with Miss Daly."

"You complained of your French," said Mrs. Leigh. "I heard of a very nice French girl who could come every day."

"I hate the French," said Evelyn.

"Why, Evelyn, you only knew madame," said Mrs. Marshall.

"That was quite enough for me," answered the girl. "She was horrid."

At this moment the baby was brought in, and Marjory begged to be allowed to hold him. She had given her whole love to the little fellow, and was always happiest when he was in her arms. It was not that she cared less for Dorothy, but she had learnt that she must share her sister with others, while this little mite was so utterly dependent still on the person who held him. Dorothy worshipped him, and was very proud of him, but she did not care to nurse him, and thought she would like him better when "he knew her and his head didn't wobble." His entry stopped the conversation, but by-and-by he fell asleep in his sister's arms, and soon after Mr. Marshall arrived.

"I never need go out for want of society," he said, laughing, after he had shaken hands with Mrs. Leigh and kissed his wife and nodded to the children. "We shall require a special train when we

go away. Well, Dorothy, aren't you pining for news of Miss Barker?"

"Has she written again?" asked Dorothy. Her father tossed her an unopened letter. "The postman just brought it," he said.

"From Rose!" she cried. "At last!"

"Oh, read it out loud!" clamoured her sisters, and Dorothy opened it and read:—

"MY DEAR OLD DOROTHY,—At last I've got a chance of writing to you, for I'm expelled, I'm expelled, and nothing they can do matters. I had a great fright that I shouldn't be found out. It was rather disappointing when we came back from the station and found no burglars. I got to bed safely, and of course everybody was late and cross next morning. Then you didn't appear, and after breakfast Ada was sent up to call you, but of course you were not there. Fearful excitement was the result, in the midst of which Miss B. appeared, who sent us all off to our classes. She came in afterwards and announced that you had been sent for home, but of course nobody believed her, and I trembled lest she should make no inquiries. But it seems this was only meant for the day-boarders, and after morning school Ada, as the best sneak in the school, was sent for and told her I'd been with you at night. So I was interviewed and let her drag the truth or part of it from me bit by bit. Of course I wouldn't tell about Nanny. So the school was told I was in disgrace for reasons that wouldn't be mentioned, and I was kept apart and just marched in for lessons, and Nanny had to take me out walking, which was fun. Of course, as she brought my meals to my room, I lived best of anyone. Every day Miss Barker came and made nasty remarks, and everybody was told your mother was very ill and you'd be back after Whitsuntide which nobody believed.

I got your letter from Nanny, but waited to answer it till I knew my fate. My uncle has been written to and told I must be removed unless I promised amendment, but your sweet father had told him all, and he said he agreed that I had better leave. I'm expelled, hurrah! and I'm to go to my aunt till they find a new school. But I shouldn't think it would be easy to find one for an expelled girl, and I don't mean to go anywhere next term. Sorry not to come to London to see you, but shall fight for a London school. The girls are not to know I'm leaving, so it's funny they talk of missing me and give me presents, isn't it? What fun your adventures were! I wish I'd been there. Nanny, Jack and the young man's girl's brother are delighted with your father's present. How jolly about the baby boy!

“P.S.—I'm not in disgrace now, which is a pity, but Miss B. hates me. Miss Porter is going to be married this summer.”

“Poor Hartley,” said Mr. Marshall, laughing. “A nice time he must have had with that lively niece. Even now he shudders at the thought.”

“But then Mr. Hartley is a regular old bachelor,” remarked Mrs. Marshall, “so I don't suppose he knew how to manage her.”

“And really she is nice,” said Dorothy eagerly. “And she doesn't like being untrue, and she isn't really. She doesn't cheat at lessons, and she doesn't say untruths for the sake of escaping punishment, but she does rather love breaking rules.”

“And it was good of her to save us,” said Marjory, who since her confession felt more generous to her old school-fellow.

"And she really seems to have been much neglected," remarked Mrs. Leigh.

"Poor Rose. She never had anyone to love and praise her," sighed Winifred.

Dorothy looked displeased. "Winifred and Marian think so much of people's opinion," she said. "I don't think it right, do you, mother? Marian shows what it may lead to, and Winifred will be as bad, for she's always hugging and kissing someone, and I think it looks affected."

"It was only because the other girls did it," protested Marian, who did not like allusions to the past.

"Why, Dorothy, don't you want to be liked?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"Yes, but I don't want to be hugged, and I don't do wrong to make people like me."

"You think you are never wrong," cried Marian, who had never quite returned to her old allegiance.

"I think you are too severe, Dorothy," said her mother. "It's quite right not to do wrong for the sake of winning affection, but there's no reason why you shouldn't try to please people."

"Father tries to please his constitooshun," cried Elinor, who was lying on the rug.

"Only by fair means Elinor," put in Mr. Marshall. "The next thing will be that I am accused by my own daughters of bribery and corruption."

"I think Dorothy would be nicer if she tried to please us more," said Isabel, and then she and Elinor began, as usual, to giggle.

"I like people to think me nice and pretty," remarked Evelyn. "I don't see why I shouldn't."

"I must go and see the son and heir bathed. Grandmamma, will you finish the discussion?" asked Mrs. Marshall, and she went away with little Francis. The others followed, for that was an entertainment they rarely missed, but Dorothy stopped for a moment.

"Don't you think it's affectation to care so much about people's opinion?"

"No, Dorothy, it may be weakness when it leads to your doing wrong, but it isn't affectation. Some people are more demonstrative than others, and all that is necessary is for them to learn to control themselves. It's rather a mistake to get in the habit of calling things affected because you don't care about them," answered Mrs. Leigh; "but suppose we talk it over another time, for I know you're longing to see Francis kicking in his bath, and if you promise not to think me affected, I'll whisper in your ear that I want to go too."

"It's a wonderful performance, no doubt, but having already witnessed it, I think I prefer a quiet smoke," observed Mr. Marshall, as they left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUMMER DAYS.

THE girls began to settle down to work. Mademoiselle Duruy came every day, and to their surprise they discovered not only that French people could be nice, but also that the French language did not present insuperable difficulties, and they soon looked forward to their lessons. They worked a little with Miss Daly, and, rather to Dorothy's disgust, Mrs. Leigh began to give piano lessons to Evelyn and Isabel, who, she said, seemed to have a good ear for music.

"We have always been an unmusical family," said Dorothy, when Mrs. Leigh came into the room, where she sat with her mother, and told them of the new arrangement.

"But there is no need to remain so," observed Mrs. Marshall.

"But I felt rather proud of it," complained Dorothy, in a somewhat aggrieved tone.

"Isn't that just a little bit of affectation?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"You have hurt her feelings," said Mrs. Marshall, as Dorothy got rather red and left the room.

"Oh, Alice, you mustn't treat her as if she were a sensitive plant," answered Mrs. Leigh. "You mustn't shrink from hurting her feelings when it's for her good, and as long as she acknowledges the justice of your remarks, she will soon get over any little irritation."

This proved to be the case, for Dorothy raised no further objections against the music lessons, and was one day discovered outside the door listening with a look of pride to Evclyn's first efforts at playing a little piece, but her own dislike was too strong to be overcome, and though she made no efforts to hinder Marian and Winifred when they wanted to try and learn, no persuasion would induce her to make the attempt.

The days passed rapidly, and in July the Marshalls went first to the seaside, and then to Elm-fields, where they were received with great delight, for the people in the village were very much attached to the family. The girls were still very shy with strangers, but they had improved in so far that they no longer ran away when spoken to, and generally managed to return an answer.

Mrs. Leigh had come with them, and she and Mrs. Marshall took them for long delightful walks and picnics, and they resented it very much when now and

then Mrs. Leigh went to town for a few days to stay with her friend Miss Grey.

Miss Grey had several times been to visit the Marshalls in London, and she also spent a few days at Elmfields, where she was much liked.

“She’s not so fond of joking as grandmamma, but she’s so sensible,” said Dorothy, when asked how she liked her.

In August Rose came to stay with them; she was as bright and full of fun as ever, and she soon developed an unexpected capacity for mischief in the younger members of the family. If there was a trespass notice shutting up a path that was the one path Rose wanted to go up, and did go up unless her elders were there to prevent her. If a tree was especially difficult to climb Rose was sure to be discovered among its branches, at some time or other. She rarely had a dress that wasn’t torn, but Miss Daly had taken a tremendous fancy to her, and gave up knitting in order to mend rents. Mr. Marshall declared she was like a fresh mountain breeze.

“Rather a boisterous one, perhaps,” he said, “but rousing, there’s no doubt of it. My girls are rather wanting in humour, and she has plenty of it, so she’s bound to do them good.”

“Do you think us wanting in humour?” asked Dorothy, astonished, “why, we all love a joke.”

"But then you don't always see a joke when there is one. It must be a good, solid joke for you to appreciate it. But you'll improve, I hope. Perhaps it's only undeveloped. Elinor's the one I've most hopes of. Isabel giggles too much," he added, as Isabel went off into a giggling fit for which there was nothing to account.

The election was of course the great excitement of the day. Mr. Marshall would not take his family, because he declared their views of politics would bring lasting disgrace on him, but he promised to send a telegram as soon as matters were decided.

The result was not known till next morning, and when the telegram was brought the whole family rushed out to fetch it.

"Elected by a large majority," ran the message, and the shout that went up under Rose's guidance would have done credit to a boys' school.

Rose also declared that the event must be duly celebrated, and a proper reception be prepared for Mr. Marshall. Dorothy and Marjory at first demurred, but they were overruled, and when the trap arrived the hero of the hour very nearly met with a bad accident as "See, the conquering hero comes," sung by eight girls in various keys, and accompanied by waving flags, was almost too much for the horse. However, all went off well, and after dinner, when the

elders strolled out to the lawn, they were greeted with fireworks, and what Elinor called a 'bonfire.' When the fireworks were over the girls danced round the fire, "like so many imps," said the new M.P., and Isabel nearly tumbled in and had to be rescued by Marjory and Dorothy, while Rose burned a hole in her best dress in her efforts to stir up the fire.

"But it was in a good cause," she said when, black and dirty from the smoke and breathless from shouting and dancing, they came back to the house.

They were all going back to town in September, and the time was drawing near, but as nothing had been said about school the girls supposed they were to go on as before. Rose felt rather gloomy. Her uncle had come down on a visit, and told her she was to return to town with the Marshalls and come to him for a few days, after which she was to go to a new school whose head had kindly consented to admit her in spite of her dark past. More than this he refused to tell her.

"So there I start my new career with a blackened character. I suppose they'll put a notice-board on me like David Copperfield, to make the girls avoid me, and I shall be a heathen and an outcast."

"Not for long, I expect," said Elinor. "I know if I were there I should be friends with you. I like prairies, and I'm always sorry for those poor Indians."

"I don't see what prairies have to do with it," said Dorothy.

"She meant pariahs, I think," said Mrs. Leigh. "I told her the word the other day, when we were looking at the pictures."

"One word's as good as another," returned Elinor, contentedly.

"It is really time Elinor became more particular," said Isabel, in a tone so like Dorothy's that everybody laughed.

"It's a pity Francis isn't older," said Evelyn. "It would be nice for Rose to marry the son and heir."

"Talking of heirs," said Mr. Marshall, "I've persuaded Aunt Fanny to send George to a public school. I hope it isn't too late, and that he'll have some of the nonsense knocked out of him."

"I can bear with his faults now," remarked Dorothy calmly. "Dear mother, to think what you saved me from!"

"I'm sure I'm very glad, Dorothy," answered Mrs. Marshall.

"Let's play something," cried Rose, jumping up. "In a few days I shall be a forlorn victim, and I mean to have a good time till then."

The Marshalls returned to town on the 18th of September. Mr. Hartley was waiting at Waterloo station, and Rose went off with him very reluctantly.

The girls missed her greatly, but in the midst of their grieving they received such a blow that they had no sympathy to spare for anyone but themselves.

It was two days after they had returned home, on a Saturday afternoon. They had been arranging their books and other treasures, and Mrs. Marshall came into the schoolroom. Mrs. Leigh was staying with Miss Grey.

"Come and sit down, children," said their mother. "I have something to tell you." She spoke gravely, and they all gathered round the table at which she had seated herself.

"Tell us quickly, mother, and don't break it to us," begged Elinor.

"It doesn't concern you younger ones," began Mrs. Marshall.

"I know what that means," cried Marian. "We are to go to school again."

"How did you know?" asked Mrs. Marshall quickly. "I hope——"

"I didn't know, I only guessed," answered Marian. "Truly, mother, I haven't been poking about to find out. Do believe me, I truly only guessed."

"But is it true, mother?" cried Dorothy in dismay.

"Quite true. On Monday you are to go to a new boarding-school"

"But why didn't you tell us before?" asked Marjory. "It's such a sudden surprise."

"We thought it better not," answered Mrs. Marshall.

"But mother, it turned out so badly before," said Dorothy.

"This time it will turn out better," answered her mother.

"But really, I don't think school the place for Marian and Evelyn," continued Dorothy. "You see you're not sending us away in anger this time, so we can discuss the matter calmly."

"I don't care whether it's good or bad, I only know I don't want to go, and I won't!" cried Marian excitedly.

"It's Isabel's and my turn to go and have adventures among strangers. Can't we go instead of Marian?" asked Elinor.

"Oh, I'm glad I'm young and can stay at home," sighed Winifred.

"Girls, just listen to me for a minute and don't interrupt!" exclaimed Mrs. Marshall. "The matter has been very seriously discussed, and we have come to the conclusion that it will be better for you to be away for the present at a boarding-school, where you can work steadily, and we have found one that we think you will like. It is not far from here, at Pin-

ner, in fact, so you will generally come home from Saturday to Monday in fine weather. The lady who keeps the school is very nice, and there is another pleasant lady who lives with her and helps amuse the girls after school hours."

"That sounds better," said Marian. "Miss Barker did not approve much of amusement."

"What are their names?" asked Evelyn.

"I wish it weren't too late to change," sighed Dorothy. "We were so happy at home."

"How horrid to leave Francis," groaned Marjory.

"You will see him often enough, Marjory, when you come home," returned Mrs. Marshall. "And Dorothy, I promise you one thing. I expect you to tell me all your fears and ideas about yourselves and the others, and if you and I agree that this school is bad for you, or if you are not happy there, you have my word and your father's that we will remove you at once."

"Thank you, mother," replied Dorothy. "That will keep me from worrying."

"Is it a big school?" asked Marian.

"There are about thirty boarders at present. It's not a very old school, and lately it has been completely reorganised."

"Do let us go, mother," cried Isabel, and Elinor added, "We never ran away from anywhere yet."

"That's a funny reason for wanting to go to school," said Mrs. Marshall, laughing. "Perhaps we can let you go at Christmas if Dorothy approves of the place."

"I know I shan't," said Dorothy, shaking her head.

"I know you will," answered her mother. "I know you'll be happy and improve. Marjory will learn not to give all her love to one person, and Evelyn won't be such a vain little girl and will learn to read good books, and Marian will become less nervous and care more for her own conscience than for other people's opinion. There, that's quite a little speech."

"You've forgotten Dorothy," cried Isabel.

"Ask Dorothy herself what she means to learn," returned Mrs. Marshall, smiling.

"I suppose I've got to learn to be guided by grown-up people's opinions," answered Dorothy thoughtfully. "I think I'm better than I used to be, but after all I'm generally right."

"Well," returned her mother, "I want you to be guided by me now and not be miserable, nor to ask me any more questions about the school. Then I'll take you there myself. And now I must leave you, and see if Mary has brought baby home."

To the children's great surprise Miss Daly not only knew they were going to school, but declared

she was very pleased, and they themselves found it very difficult to be miserable because everyone was smiling, and there was an air of joyful mystery about the matter. So they tried to bear up, cheered by the thought that they could leave the school at Christmas if they wished to.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW SCHOOL.

THEY were to go to school on Monday afternoon, and the morning was spent in packing.

“I shall be able to get things as you want them,” said Mrs. Marshall after breakfast, “as you are so near.”

“And it will be better not to take too much in case we leave soon,” added Dorothy.

Mr. Marshall laughed. “At all events,” he said, as he rose to go to his study, “if you do run away it won’t be such an expensive business this time. Do it unaided if you can, so that there are fewer people to tip.”

The girls felt rather uneasy as the train drew near Pinner, but Mrs. Marshall took no notice, but talked about the scenery. At the station they took a fly and drove for some little way till they turned in at a gate and stopped before an old-fashioned looking house. There was a garden in front with bushes shutting out the road and gay geraniums in the beds. The door opened and they entered a large square hall, where they were received by—Mrs. Leigh and Miss Grey, who burst out laughing at their astonishment.

"Welcome to my school, girls," said Miss Grey, after shaking hands with Mrs. Marshall.

"Your school!" cried Dorothy. "Is it really your school?"

"Yes," answered Miss Grey. "It is my school, and Mrs. Leigh lives with me."

"In the character of general entertainer," said Mrs. Leigh. "Now come to the cloak-room, take off your things, and then we'll explain everything."

"The others come to-morrow," said Miss Grey, "but we thought we'd like you to come first, see everything, and then help welcome the others."

She led the way to the cloak-room, but the girls were so excited that they could scarcely unbutton their jackets.

"Why didn't you tell us, mother? We wouldn't have minded so much then," said Dorothy.

"Partly as a joke, dear, partly to see if you wouldn't trust me," answered Mrs. Marshall.

"I didn't very much," returned Dorothy frankly, "I felt sure we'd be back in a fortnight."

"I thought Miss Grey only taught in a school," observed Marjory.

"So I did," answered Miss Grey. "I taught in a school in the north, and then I thought I would like one of my own, so as I found the head of this school wished to retire, I took it, and have been teaching here since Easter in order to know the girls. Now Mrs. Leigh and I are going to try and see if we cannot make you happy, as well as learned."

"I don't mind being learned as long as I'm happy," remarked Evelyn.

"But I don't know why you're here, grandmamma," said Marian. "Are you going to teach?"

"No," answered Mrs. Leigh, "But in the evening when your teachers are tired of you, I am going to look after you, talk with you and play with you, just as it happens."

"How delightful!" cried Dorothy.

"Too beautiful to be believed," said a voice at the door. The girls stared. "Rose!" they cried.

Rose ran in and began to hug everybody. "Isn't it lovely?" she cried: "I've been keeping back because I was afraid if everything broke upon you at

once the shock would be too great for you. I nearly had a fit when I arrived, and no one's going to throw my past at me, and there's a playground and a cricket field and a gymnasium, and there's only one drawback."

"What is that?" asked Miss Grey. "You may tell me frankly, as I want you to feel happy here."

"There are so few rules," returned Rose. "And I always thought half the fun of school was breaking rules."

Miss Grey laughed. "I'm sorry for you, Rose," she said. "But I never make many rules because I prefer that those I make should be kept, so you must find some other way of being happy. And I shall look to you to help me and see that the few rules are obeyed."

"I'll do anything for you and Mrs. Leigh," answered Rose impetuously. "You're the first school people who seem to feel that I've my good points."

"Now come and see the house," said Miss Grey.

"Have you seen it, mother?" asked Marian.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Marshall, "and I think you'll like it."

"You can keep secrets well," exclaimed Marian in admiration, as they left the room.

It was a delightful house. The two large school-rooms on each side of the hall were bright and

pleasant-looking, there were pictures on the walls, flowers at the windows, and separate desks with comfortable seats for each girl.

"Plenty of room for everybody," said Rose, "so it doesn't matter if one has a stout neighbour."

A narrow passage on the right led to the dining-room, and behind a swing door lay the servants' part of the house. The dining-room was bright and cheerful, "like a home dining room," said Marian. On the other side of the passage were a music room, and a prettily furnished room with books, cabinets of curiosities and specimens.

"This is the library," said Miss Grey, "where the elder girls can sit and read and study. They will be responsible for keeping the room in good condition."

On the other side of the hall was the second schoolroom, and corresponding to the dining-room at the back was a large room looking on the garden.

"This is my sanctum," said Mrs. Leigh, "where I shall spend the evening with good girls. I mean to have some pleasant times here."

"It's no use speaking. It's too blissful!" sighed Rose, squeezing Dorothy's arm in ecstasy.

"What's that building at the side?" asked Evelyn, looking out of the window.

"That's the hall, but we'll go to the bedrooms first," answered Miss Grey, and she led them up-

stairs, where the rooms were what Rose called "upy and downy," for there were all sorts of unexpected steps and passages. Miss Grey and Mrs. Leigh had each a bedroom and a sitting room. The girls' rooms, which were simply but prettily furnished, were not to have more than two occupants each.

"I have not put up any pictures," said Miss Grey, "because I think girls like to have their home photographs about them. These are the two bathrooms," she went on, opening the doors. "If my experiment answers, we may be able to build a swimming bath eventually."

"I shall begin to wish I could go to school again," remarked Mrs. Marshall, as they went downstairs.

At the back of the entrance hall were the cloak-rooms; a few steps and a narrow passage led to the large hall, which was intended for recreation, drill, gymnastics and dancing.

"What's the platform for?" asked Dorothy.

"For lectures and concerts and theatricals," answered Miss Grey, leading the way into the garden. "Every girl will have a little bit of garden where she can plant what she likes," she went on.

"I shall plant mustard and cress," said Rose. "That grows everywhere and is no trouble."

At the end of the garden was the playground, and beyond lay a field.

"That is for hockey and cricket," said Miss Grey.
"Football I think too rough for girls."

"And for boys, too," added Mrs. Marshall. "I tremble when I think of Francis playing."

"It's early days for that," said Mrs. Leigh, laughing, as the whole party returned to the house to tea. Soon after Mr. Marshall came to fetch his wife.

"How about the girls?" he asked. "I want no more reproaches, so they can come with us if they like."

But the girls declared they were quite ready to stay, and Mr. and Mrs. Marshall went away, leaving bright and happy faces behind them.

THE END.

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